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RADIO WAVES

THE NEW SOUNDS OF UNMANAGED DEMOCRACY

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CALLING AIR AMERICA • NICHOLAS von HOFFMAN
PROMETHEUS UNBOUND • RICK KARR | AMY GOODMAN'S 'EMPIRE' • LIZZY RATNER
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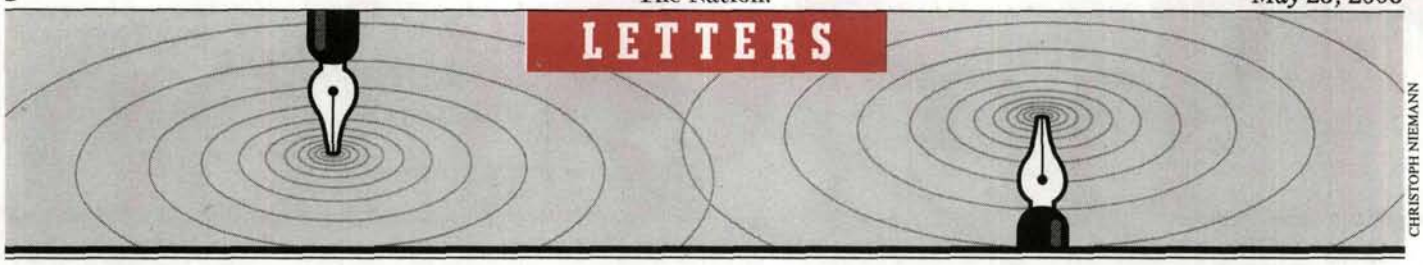

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Radio Days—and Nights

Responding to our call for "Radio Raves," readers eager to extol the virtues of their favorite radio stations overwhelmed our in-box. Air America Radio (although it's not actually a station) was extremely popular (a "life raft" to one reader), as was any station that carried Amy Goodman's Democracy Now!, *the most often cited program. Many readers rely on NPR for insuring their sanity in these trying times, but others find it "too mainstream." College stations and independent volunteer-staffed stations were high on many lists.* —*The Editors*

Orange, Conn.

■ The best station is Bridgeport's WPKN, of course. It's truly independent—no college affiliation, no NPR or PRI, no corporate underwriting, just community support. The free spirit of college radio but with mature production values. Eclectic music selection that's both broad and deep. A strong social conscience. Oh, yes, they carry *RadioNation*. JOHN BROWN

Newbury, Mass.

■ I live on the border between Vermont and New Hampshire. My favorite is split between NHPR (more talk-radio like Diane Rehm and more BBC) and VPR (Vermont news interspersed with *All Things Considered*, etc., some BBC and great jazz). PETER KEYES

Ithaca, NY

■ WEOS, Geneva, New York. In retirement, I find the NPR talk shows are a way to keep on learning and stave off Alzheimer's. WEOS brings me *Democracy Now!*, *Fresh Air*, *Alternative Radio*, *Free Speech Radio*, *RadioNation*, *Talk of the Nation* and *Plato's Cave* (local show). MARGARET MYERS

Tucson

■ KXCI (91.3) in Tucson broadcasts *Democracy Now!* every day at 3, followed by Jim Hightower. It's nice to hear such humor after Amy's broadcast. If I had to listen to NPR drivel all day long, I'd just lay down and die. BARBARA WISH

Chicago

■ WFMT (98.7) in Chicago, with its classical/orchestral programming and live-read advertising, is a calm sea of tranquillity in an insane world. Have you ever "needed" a string quartet like some "need" a drink after a long day at the office? I'll take the quartet! ROBERT BOEHM

Kentfield, Calif.

■ KALW, the public station of the San Francisco Unified School District, is not afraid to air programs that may provoke the community; it has not succumbed to "commercializing" public radio; it remains accountable to and committed to serving the community. It airs Laura Flanders, Tavis Smiley, *Philosophy Talks*, *As It Happens* from the CBC and monthly feedback from listeners. It doesn't run from controversy. This is what public radio was and should be. GERRI CALDAROLA

Minneapolis

■ I'm a listener, member and volunteer at KFAI-FM (90.3 and 106.7), Fresh Air Radio, Minneapolis and St. Paul. It engages more than 300 volunteers, held together by a paid staff of only six! It is available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day on the dial, online or via satellite. For International Women's Day it broadcast twenty-four hours of programs of, for and by women. JIM KRAHN

San Francisco

■ KALW offers a comfortable listening experience that is well tuned to the San Francisco aesthetic. Excellent homegrown programming like *Invisible Ink*, along with funky locally focused features like daily school lunch menu reports, make for a welcoming feeling whenever the dial is on 91.7. ROB FAGEN

Brookline, Mass.

■ Reality Radio—WZBC (90.3), Newton—is brought to you by investigative reporters who do not work for the President and his gang but answer to a higher power: the Constitution, the American people and truth and justice. Noncorporate news *is* available in the Boston area at WZBC, which broadcasts from Boston College and features music and a host of programming not cleared by the ministry of homeland propaganda. Witness, *Democracy Now!* and *Sounds of Dissent*. NINA LYDIA OLFF

Washington, DC

■ At 100 watts of free-form, fuel-injected fury, Radio CPR (97.5; www.radiocpr.com) is the only reason to turn on the receiver in Washington, DC. Homegrown go-go and Scandinavian death metal own Wednesday nights, while punk, roots reggae and community news workout the frequency on other nights. ANDREW MYERS

Arena, Wisc.

■ WORT (89.9) listener-sponsored community radio in Madison is a long-lived example of a flourishing independent media outlet that struggles to serve us all. On its narrow band and budget, it provides programming about politics, music, health and general welfare unlike any other. WORT is the best example of conscientious media. It's owned by everybody. DAVID GIFFEY

Asheville, NC

■ WPVM is my favorite because of its progressive content and music that isn't blatantly mainstream. It is a low-power FM station that strives to inform the community in an objective way. WPVM is the best radio station in Western North Carolina! KIMBERLY MILLER

Shoreline, Wash.

■ KSER (90.7) in Everett has only one full-time manager and more than 100 volunteers. It provides an exceptional and diverse radio experience. I listen daily to commercial-free music, news and other programming (including *RadioNation*). JOHN THIELKE

Portland, Ore.

■ Our community station, KBOO-FM, dares to say things one doesn't normally hear and lets diversity and dialogue have a forum, with a schedule. It's peopled mostly by volunteers, and the variety reflects all of us. There are hits and misses, sort of like live TV was once upon a time. The opportunity to hear many different perspectives and people who bring experiences from the full spectrum of life and trust that we the people can make up our own minds without the slick and slimy spin of commercial radio and TV, is nothing short of miraculous. CELIA MURRAY

Valencia, Spain

■ I nominate Radio France International because it gives important news from across the globe and puts analysis and content above being showy to attract audiences. There is an English and a French version, and there are no commercials, also a big plus. ERIC TRUSIEWICZ

San Antonio, Tex.

■ I jotted this down while driving on I-10 from Fort Stockton to San Antonio (and steering with my knee):

I'm on I-10, nearing home
After 500 miles of West Texas oil fields
(And 500 miles of radio static).
Truckers are gearing down,
Pulling the long hill out of Junction.
Passing them, the first glow of civilization
Crackles through the night:
Townes's "White Freightliner Blues,"
From Fredericksburg's KFAN
Is an epiphany. MATT FRONDORF

(Continued on Page 40)

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IN THIS ISSUE

LETTERS

2 RADIO DAYS—AND NIGHTS
"Radio Raves" from our readers

EDITORIALS & COMMENT

3 RADIO WAVES

4 LABOR'S LOST IN LA
Marc Cooper

6 BUSH'S BITBURG?
Mark Ames

7 COMIX NATION
Died Purple
Sue Coe

8 SUPERNANNY STATE
Alfie Kohn

10 IN FACT...

11 LETTER FROM GROUND ZERO
Nuclear Renaissance
Jonathan Schell

COLUMNS

8 DEADLINE POET
George W. Bush Has No Liquidity...
Calvin Trillin

12 DIARY OF A MAD LAW PROFESSOR
Beyond the Pale
Patricia J. Williams

14 THE LIBERAL MEDIA
What Would Dewey Do?
Eric Alterman

ARTICLES

15 CONFESSIONS OF A LISTENER
Garrison Keillor

18 CALLING AIR AMERICA
Nicholas von Hoffman

22 PROMETHEUS UNBOUND
Rick Karr

27 AMY GOODMAN'S "EMPIRE"
Lizzy Ratner

31 CONGRESS TUNES IN
Robert W. McChesney, John Nichols and Ben Scott

32 ANYONE LISTENING?
Eric Magnuson

34 GOOD, GRAY NPR
Scott Sherman

BOOKS & THE ARTS

41 REYNOLDS: John Brown, Abolitionist
Martin Duberman

46 BORDEWICH: Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America
Drew Faust

48 IN OUR ORBIT

49 WASHINGTON-WILLIAMS AND STADIEM: Dear Senator: A Memoir by the Daughter of Strom Thurmond
Darryl Lorenzo Wellington

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EDITORIALS

Radio Waves

It has been more than a quarter-century since Elvis Costello first spit out the biting lyrics of his song "Radio Radio": "The radio is in the hands of such a lot of fools/Tryin' to anaesthetize the way that you feel." But while Costello and the punks and New Wavers did their best to push back against increasing homogenization, the promise of radio—long the most democratic of the traditional mass media—continued to be squandered. Big media corporations and their allies in Congress and on the Federal Communications Commission quietly rewrote the rules during the 1980s and '90s to clear away barriers to consolidation, thereby ushering in an era in which the news was dumbed down, dissent was stifled and the music all started to sound the same.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the death of radio: A new generation of progressives began to fight back. As Garrison Keillor says on page 17, "Liberals actually enjoy living in a free society; tuning in to hear an echo is not our idea of a good time." Responses to the collapse of diversity that followed passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act haven't made radio what it should be, especially at the local level. But activists have restored hope that radio might again become a vehicle for spreading democracy and culture. Most Americans can now listen to *Democracy Now!* with Amy Goodman (profiled by Lizzy Ratner on page 27) on Pacifica, community or NPR stations, as well as on public-access cable TV, Free Speech TV, shortwave radio and the Internet. And in more than fifty communities across the country, including sixteen of the top radio twenty, they can tune in to Air America (profiled by Nicholas von Hoffman on page 18) and hear Al Franken, Randi Rhodes, Janeane Garofalo and others offer a bracing counter to the ranting of Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. North Dakota populist Ed Schultz is heard on more than eighty stations, along with the XM and Sirius satellite networks. And in national markets, NPR offers an alternative, although, as Scott Sherman notes on page 34, it is not nearly as spirited or edgy an option as it once was. In a dozen states, mainly in the upper Midwest and West, community organizations and activists, working in consortiums like the Minnesota News Connection and the Northern Rockies News Service, have begun producing and distributing quality news and public affairs programs to fill the gap created by the shuttering of local news operations.

It's too early to say that a corner has been turned: Consolidation continues, and with it the squeezing out not just of ideas but of the vast majority of recording artists and some of the most vibrant genres of regional music. But it's getting harder for big media to win the important fights, thanks to a burgeoning media reform movement detailed on page 31 by Robert W. McChesney, John Nichols and Ben Scott. That movement has prevented the implementation of an industry-backed restructuring of ownership rules and is winning allies for moves to address both the damage done by consolidation and consolidation itself. One means for doing that is low-power FM radio, whose leading champion is the Prometheus Radio Project (profiled by Rick Karr on page 22). The reform movement has also prompted debates about regulation of satellite radio, podcasting and other new technologies.

There is still a lot of work to do. But the combination of programming innovations, new technologies and a media reform movement that has the clout not just to prevent the bad but promote the good might yet put meaning into another line from Elvis Costello's old song: "Radio is a sound salvation."

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COMMENT

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Labor's Lost in LA

When Los Angeles voters choose between incumbent Mayor Jim Hahn and challenger Antonio Villaraigosa in the city's May 17 nonpartisan runoff election, a political judgment will also be rendered on what many consider the most successful and powerful of urban labor movements.

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, which for the past decade has been the engine of a labor-Latino alliance that has boosted a scorecard's worth of progressive candidates into local office, looks this time like it's chosen the wrong side. Villaraigosa, who in the last *Los Angeles Times* poll was floating eighteen points above the scandal-plagued incumbent, is considered to be the most pro-labor pol west of the Mississippi. The former union organizer and Southern California ACLU president had a perfect union voting record when he served as speaker of the California Assembly. The County Fed poured more than $1 million into his race when he ran against Hahn in 2001, and then supported him again a year later when he won a City Council seat.

But this time around, the local federation of more than 350 unions snubbed Villaraigosa and endorsed the more centrist Hahn. The union leadership made the move in exchange for the Mayor's support of labor's political wish list and as part of a deal to promote the Mayor's job-rich $11 billion airport expansion plan (which Villaraigosa opposes). As a quid pro quo Hahn appointed County Fed leader Miguel Contreras and other union allies to important city commissions.

The expedient alliance with Hahn, however, is coming back to haunt labor. In the March primary election a plurality of union households ignored their leadership's endorsement and voted for Villaraigosa. "Part of it is we are a victim of our own success," Contreras explained to the press. "After all those years of telling people to vote for Antonio, it's hard to tell them to vote for someone else." And as the hard-fought runoff goes into the home stretch, things have gotten stickier. With Villaraigosa garnering the endorsement of major Latino, black and environmental leaders, as well as the local Democratic Party, John Kerry, and most of all the other major candidates who were defeated in the primary, just about the only institutional support left for Hahn comes from the labor federation.

Though possessed of a soporific governing style, Hahn is a ferocious campaigner who in 2001 didn't flinch from smearing Villaraigosa as somehow connected to crack dealing. In these final weeks, Hahn has again chosen to go down and dirty. As former city attorney he imposed several antigang injunctions, and now his campaign is focusing on how the local ACLU, when led by Villaraigosa, sued to stop what it considered to be unconstitutional measures. The Hahn campaign has suggested that Villaraigosa led this action on behalf of the targeted gangs, not on constitutional issues. And in a move that surprised even the most cynical observers, Hahn recently announced his endorsement of a new ballot initiative that would restore a Christian cross to the LA County official seal. The cross was removed recently after the ACLU threatened to sue. The mayor's endorsement of

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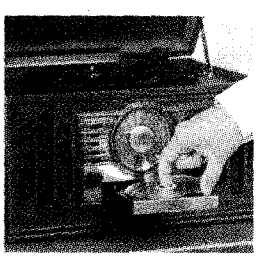

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COMMENT

this fringe measure is aimed not only at rallying the conservative suburban vote but also at positioning Villaraigosa as antifaith.

Hahn's final television ad barrage is expected to focus on intensely negative themes, painting Villaraigosa as pro-gang, anticop and antireligious. With the County Federation of Labor serving as Hahn's last significant reserve, union money could very well end up financing those attacks. At a minimum, local labor's political imprimatur is already indelibly stamped on Hahn's negative campaign. "This would be a good time for us to be taking an extended vacation in Tahiti," darkly joked one top-level labor official opposed to the Hahn endorsement. "How do you explain to your rank and file that their dues are being used to beat up the guy they want to vote for?"

At a time when the national labor movement is going through a highly public internal debate over where to put its emphasis—on organizing or supporting political campaigns—what happens in LA is crucial. Says the labor official: "It doesn't make much sense to spend all that money on candidates if at a minimum you're not spending it on the right ones, does it?" MARC COOPER

Marc Cooper, a contributing editor, is a senior fellow at the Institute for Justice and Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication.

Bush's Bitburg?

Many analysts are saying that President Bush's decision to visit Latvia just two days before heading to Moscow to celebrate the victory over Nazi Germany was designed to "send a message" to Russian leader Vladimir Putin. But by choosing Latvia, a former Soviet republic that became independent in 1991, Bush is stirring bitter controversy among Nazism's greatest victims and risking a repeat of Ronald Reagan's Bitburg fiasco. "I am sorry that this is the time for the visit," said Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem. "If the Baltics had really repented for the terrible crimes that their nationals committed during the Holocaust, then it would make far more sense to 'reward them' by a visit in the proximity of the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over the Nazis."

Moscow agrees. Official discrimination in Latvia and neighboring Estonia against their large Russian-speaking minorities is one of post-Soviet Russia's greatest ongoing grievances, leading to repeated official protests. Putin raised the issue again in his April 25 State of the Union speech, calling on Latvia and Estonia to "prove in actions their respect for human rights, including the rights of national minorities." Another grievance, shared by Russians and Jews, is Latvia's disturbingly tolerant view of its own Nazi past. Zuroff complained that while Latvia has managed to prosecute several former Soviet functionaries for Communist crimes, not a single Nazi collaborator has been tried since the country became independent. In 2000 Zuroff discovered that at least forty-one Latvian members of the Arajs Kommando, a notorious Latvian security unit implicated in the shootings of thousands of Jews, had just been officially rehabilitated and rewarded with increased pensions.

Ninety-six percent of Latvia's Jews were killed in the Holocaust, one of Europe's highest rates and only made possible by enthusiastic local collaboration. Latvia also had one of the highest per capita recruitment rates into special SS legions, whose veterans are revered as "freedom fighters." Today Latvia is the only country in Europe to host annual SS veteran processions commemorating the day the divisions were formed (Estonia used to hold them too). Both the Latvian Parliament and President Vaira Vike-Freiberga—whom Zuroff labeled a "metaphor for the whole problem"—at one time considered combining the day of the SS march with the national memorial holiday. Aleksandrs Gilmans, a former member of the Riga city parliament and an ethnic-Russian Jew, was one of more than thirty protesters arrested at the SS procession in March. "The problem is that there was never a process of de-Nazification in Latvia," he said. "People here do not recognize Latvia's war guilt."

This Latvian revisionism is not merely an emotional historical debate; it is the main justification for disenfranchising the Russian-speaking minority, whom Latvian parliamentarian Aleksandrs Kirsteins, leader of the committee on foreign affairs, referred to as "civilian occupiers." Automatic citizenship is granted only to those who settled in the country before 1940. While half of Latvia's Russian-speaking minority managed to obtain citizenship through grueling tests and requirements, another 500,000 of them, or 20 percent of the population, are still stateless, making them Europe's largest disenfranchised minority. Roughly half of Latvia's 14,000 Jews share their stateless fate. No citizenship means that they can't vote or become teachers or civil servants.

Latvians' contempt for Russia is so deeply ingrained that they don't even bother hiding it. This year Vike-Freiberga presented Putin with a new Latvian history textbook that uses a Nazi-era term to describe the Salaspils concentration camp, where tens of thousands of inmates died, most of them Jews. She also famously quipped that on the upcoming victory day celebration, "Russian people will place a Caspian roach on a newspaper, drink vodka, sing folk songs and recall how they heroically conquered the Baltics." Both of these scandals still get repeated airplay in Russia, which lost 27 million citizens during the war, a staggering figure that reflects the fact that the Soviets bore the brunt of Nazi terror, and that Soviet forces were largely responsible for defeating Germany. Russia is saturated with films and books about Nazi horrors. Yet most ethnic Balts, who were treated as allies by the Germans but who suffered terribly under Soviet occupation, view the defeat of the Nazis as their own defeat.

Tatyana Zhdanok, a Latvian MP in the European Parliament from the country's Russian-speaking minority, lost much of her family in the Holocaust. "For me personally, the political revanchism going on in Latvia is very painful," she said. "So of course it seems very strange to combine a visit to Latvia with a visit to Moscow [to celebrate the victory over Nazism]." Zhdanok said she was concerned by local reports that Bush's Latvian itinerary will include a visit to the Freedom Monument, site of the Brothers' Cemetery, where SS Legion Gruppenführer Rudolf Bangerskis's remains were ceremoniously reburied in 1995.

If Bush visits the site, he could have a controversy on his hands equivalent to that stirred up by President Reagan's visit to the German war cemetery at Bitburg, where SS soldiers are buried. The

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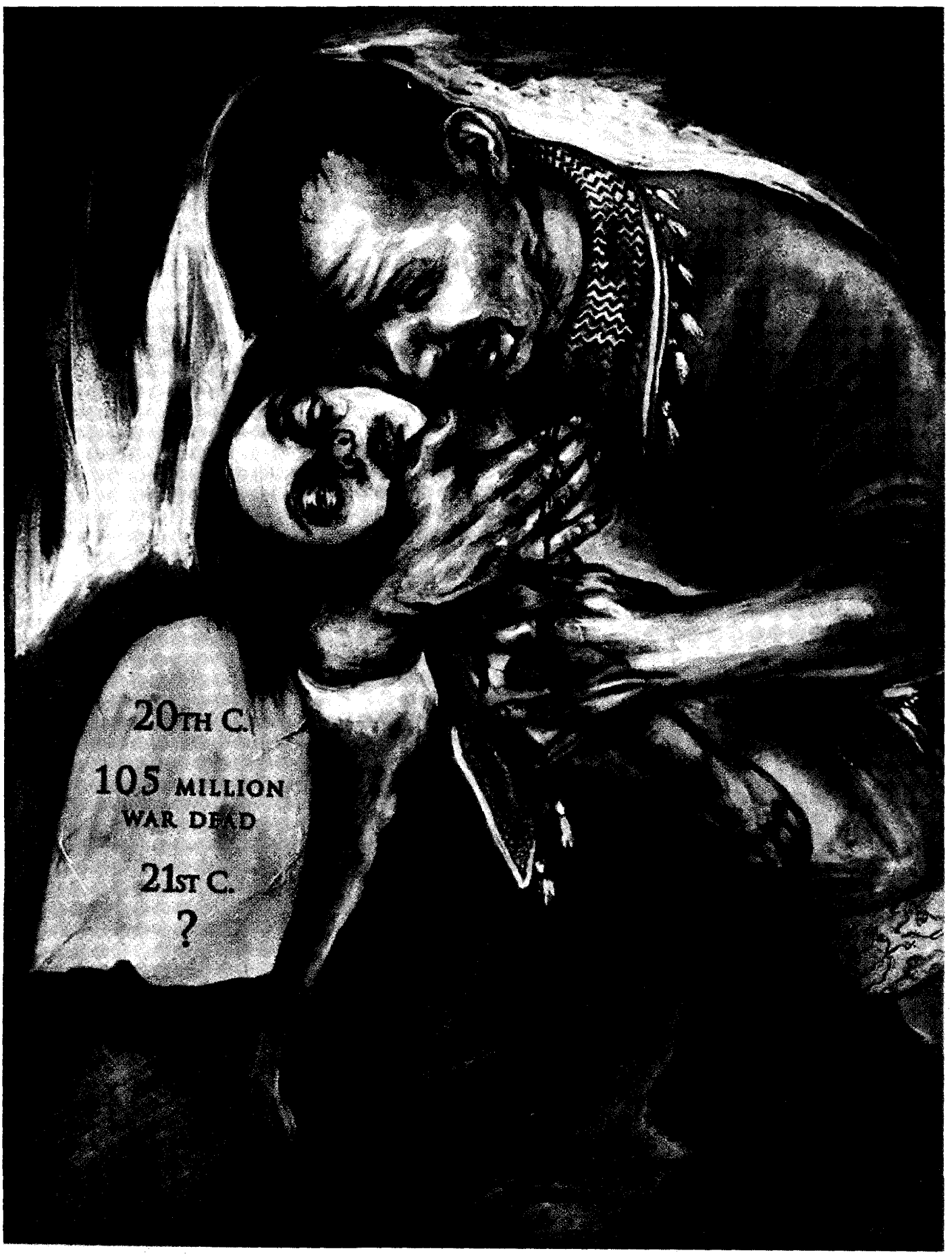

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COMMENT

White House has not yet announced Bush's itinerary in Latvia, except that he will meet with the heads of all three Baltic states, two of whom are loudly boycotting the Moscow celebration.

Many Russian speakers say that if Bush is serious about spreading human rights and democracy, then he should meet with Latvia's disenfranchised minority. Indeed, there is a precedent. In 2001 Bush sent then–Secretary of State Colin Powell to Macedonia to help resolve that country's conflict with its minority Albanian population, who at least had citizenship and voting rights. Powell at the time declared, "Multi-ethnicity need not be a source of conflict...if channels are opened for all to be made part of the democratic and political process."

While there is hope that Bush will make a similar gesture in Latvia, the fear among Russians and Jews is that instead of addressing minority rights issues and historical grievances, President Bush will use his visit to pat the Baltic presidents on the head for supporting his war in Iraq, blunder his way into a controversial cemetery site and then ride into Russia to teach Putin about the lessons of history and human rights. MARK AMES

Mark Ames, editor of Moscow's alternative paper The eXile *(www.exile.ru), is author of the upcoming* Going Postal: Rage, Murder and Rebellion From Reagan's Workplaces to Clinton's Columbine and Beyond.

CALVIN TRILLIN

GEORGE W. BUSH, WHO SAYS HE'S A MAN WITH A LOT OF POLITICAL CAPITAL, FINDS THAT HE HAS NO LIQUIDITY

He's lost support and stirred up people's fears
With plans to fiddle with their golden years.
Iraq's a mess, and, everyone agrees,
Schiavo exploitation failed to please
The folks who thought our way of life forebore us
From meddling in other people's tsoris.
With gas too dear to start a truck up,
His only answer is some Saudi suck-up.
DeLay, it's clear, is wallowing in graft,
And Bolton seems at least a little daft.
(Forgiveness, Khrushchev, surely is your due
If our guy starts to rant and pound his shoe.)
So Bush's numbers tumble toward the floor,
Reminding us of what we've seen before.
But why is that? Why does this path seem trodden?
Remember what Bush was before bin Laden.

Supernanny State

A despot welcomes a riot. Disorder provides an excuse to rescind liberties in the name of restoring calm. There are only two choices, after all: chaos and control.

The creators of *Supernanny* and *Nanny 911* understand this. Each week they poke their cameras into a dysfunctional suburban home where the children are bouncing off the walls and the parents are ready to climb them. There's whining, there's yelling, there's hitting...and the kids are just as bad. But wait. Look up there: It's a bird. It's a plain-dressed, no-nonsense British nanny, poised to swoop in with a prescription for old-fashioned control. Soon the clueless American parents will be comfortably back in charge, the children will be calm and compliant, and everyone will be sodden with gratitude. Cue the syrupy music, the slow-mo hugs, the peek at next week's even more hopeless family.

Of course, the choice of anarchic households sets us up to root for totalitarian solutions (anything to stop the rioting). Moreover, we're asked to believe that families can be utterly transformed in a few days and to assume that the final redemptive images reveal the exceptional skills of the nanny—rather than the program's editing staff. We might just laugh off the implausibility of these programs except that they're teaching millions of real parents how to raise their real kids. To that extent, it matters that they're selling snake oil.

Consider ABC's *Supernanny* (Fox's copycat, *Nanny 911*, differs mostly in that a rotating cast of nannies shares top billing). The show is rigidly formulaic: Jo Frost, the titular nanny and now bestselling author, arrives, observes, grimaces, states the obvious, imposes a schedule along with a set of rules and punishments. The parents stumble but then get the hang of her system. Contentment ensues.

The limits of the show, however, are less consequential than the limits of its star. Frost's approach to family crises is stunningly simple-minded; it's the narrowness of her repertoire, not merely the constraints of the medium, that leads her to ignore the important questions. Are the parents' expectations appropriate for the age of the child? Might something deeper than a lack of skills explain why they respond, or fail to respond, to their children as they do? How were they raised?

The nanny never peers below the surface, and her analysis of every family is identical. The problem is always that the parents aren't sufficiently vigorous in controlling their children. She has no reservations about power as long as only the big people have it. Kids are the enemy to be conquered. (At the beginning of *Nanny 911*, the stentorian narrator warns of tots "taking over the household"; the children in one episode are described as "little monsters.") Parents learn how to get them to take their naps *now*. Whether the kids are tired is irrelevant.

Supernanny's favorite words are "technique" and "consistency." First, a schedule is posted—they will all eat at 6 o'clock because she says so—and the children are given a list of generic rules. The point is enforcement and order, not teaching and reflection. Thus, rather than helping a child to think about the effects

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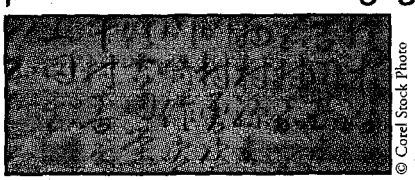

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Japanese calligraphy. In Japanese, the only consonant that can occur at the end of a word is *n*. Featured in Lecture 9.

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Professor John McWhorter (Ph.D., Stanford University) is Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. An accomplished scholar, he is also a skilled popularizer, whose book *The Power of Babel* was called "startling, provocative, and remarkably entertaining" by the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. The London *Times* calls him "a born teacher."

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COMMENT

of his aggression on others, he is simply informed that hitting is "unacceptable"; reasons and morality don't enter into it. Then he is forced to "stand in the naughty corner." Later, the nanny instructs Dad to command the child to apologize. The desired words are muttered under duress. The adults seem pleased.

For balance, kids are controlled with rewards as well as punishments. Those who haven't been eating what (or when, or as much as) the parent wishes are slathered with praise as soon as they do so—a "Good boy!" for every mouthful. Sure enough, they fork in more food. These children may be so desperate for acceptance that they settle for contingent reinforcement in place of the unconditional love they really need.

On one episode, a boy is playing with a hose in the backyard when his mother suddenly announces, "You're done." The boy protests ("I'm cleaning!"), so she turns off the water. He becomes angry and kicks over a wagon. Supernanny is incredulous: "Just because she turned the water off!" There is no comment about the autocratic, disrespectful parenting that precipitated his outburst. But then, autocratic, disrespectful parenting is her stock in trade.

Supernanny's superficiality isn't accidental; it's ideological. What these shows are peddling is behaviorism. The point isn't to raise a child; it's to reinforce or extinguish discrete behaviors—which is sufficient if you believe, along with the late B.F. Skinner and his surviving minions, that there's nothing to us other than those behaviors.

Behaviorism is as American as rewarding children with apple pie. We're a busy people, with fortunes to make and lands to conquer. Just give us techniques that work. If firing thousands of employees succeeds in boosting the company's stock price; if imposing a scripted, mind-numbing curriculum succeeds in raising students' test scores; if relying on bribes and threats succeeds in making children obey, then there's no need to ask, "But for how long does it work? And at what cost?"

In the course of researching a book on these issues, I discovered some disconcerting research on the damaging effects of techniques like the "naughty corner" (better known as time-out), which are basically forms of love withdrawal. I also found quite a bit of evidence that parents who refrain from excessive control and rely instead on warmth and reason are more likely to have children who do what they're asked—and who grow into responsible, compassionate, healthy people.

The nanny programs actually provide a fairly reliable guide to how not to raise children. They also offer an invitation to think about the pervasiveness of pop behaviorism and our hunger for the quick fix. "I guarantee you," Supernanny earnestly, if tautologically, exhorts one pair of parents, "every time you're consistent, [your child] gets the same message."

Granted, but what message? ALFIE KOHN

Alfie Kohn's latest book is Unconditional Parenting: Moving From Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason *(Atria). He lives (actually) in the Boston area and (virtually) at www.alfiekohn.org.*

In Fact . . .

KENNETH CLARK

■ "Racial considerations intruding upon the educational process contaminate education at the source," Kenneth Clark wrote in these pages in 1979. As an African-American and the son of a trade-union shop steward, Clark believed in equality. As a psychologist, he believed in evidence. It was the combined commitment to evidence and equality that lent his studies on children of segregated schools such authority they became the basis for the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Until his death on May 1, just shy of *Brown*'s fifty-first anniversary, Clark remained fiercely attached to those principles. By every measure he was able to define—children's self-esteem, students' performance on tests, flow of education dollars—separate-but-equal remained for Clark "a contradiction in terms for blacks," even when expressed through such institutions as historically black colleges. His unwavering dedication to the core analysis of *Brown* led him to condemn, at various junctures, African-American separatism, Jewish racism, New York community school boards and liberal white intellectuals who "have lost all empathy with low-income people and black people." Clark was as hard on his own early naïve optimism, and he understood that the courts, Justice Department and some black leaders long ago wrote off the Second Reconstruction promised by *Brown*. But he refused any intellectual accommodation with resegregation. Kenneth Clark was one of the country's great truth-tellers.

MINORITY/MAJORITY

■ **Permanent Minority.** Democratic State Representative Wes McKinley of Colorado recently cast the deciding vote against a Democratic landowner-rights bill that would have forced oil and gas companies to pay more for harming private property when they drill.

■ **Toward the Majority.** Democrats and Progressives in the Vermont House joined to pass universal healthcare legislation over the strong objections of Republican legislators and the health insurance industry. The bill now moves to the Vermont Senate for consideration. —DAVID SIROTA

MEET THE ARTIST

■ Our "ComixNation" byliner this week is Sue Coe, a New York artist and illustrator and longtime contributor to this magazine who modestly describes herself as "double parked on the highway of life." Her books include *Dead Meat* (with an introduction by Alexander Cockburn) and *Bully!* (with Judith Brody).

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ Read Tom Hayden's and Dennis Kucinich's appeals to Howard Dean not to take the antiwar majority of the Democratic Party for granted. And check out our website changes, including a redesigned homepage, a way to talk to *Nation* writers and each other, and a new progressive news feed. At www.thenation.com.

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JONATHAN SCHELL

Nuclear Renaissance

The review conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), a five-yearly event, opened in New York on May 2 without benefit of an agenda. The conference had no agenda because the world has no agenda with respect to nuclear arms. Broadly speaking, two groups of nations are setting the pace of events. One—the possessors of nuclear arms under the terms of the treaty, comprising the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China—wants to hold on to its nuclear arsenals indefinitely. The other group—call them the proliferators—has only recently acquired the weapons or would like to do so. Notable among them are North Korea, which by its own account has built a small arsenal, and Iran, which appears to be using its domestic nuclear-power program to create a nuclear-weapon capacity. As the conference began, Iran announced that it would soon end a moratorium on the production of fissile materials and Pyongyang declared that it had become a full-fledged nuclear power—a declaration buttressed by testimony in the Senate from the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Vice Adm. Lowell Jacoby, that North Korea now has rockets capable of landing nuclear warheads on the United States. If the two countries establish themselves as nuclear powers, a long list of other countries in the Middle East and North Asia may seek to follow suit. In that case, the NPT will be a dead letter, and the gates of unlimited proliferation will swing open.

The two groups of nations are in collision. The possessors want to stop the proliferators, and the proliferators want to defy them as well as ask them to get rid of their own mountainous nuclear arsenals. One of the liveliest debates at the conference concerns the nuclear fuel cycle, whereby fuel for both nuclear power and nuclear bomb materials is made. In the possessor countries, proposals abound to restrict this capacity to themselves, thus digging a moat around not only their arsenals but their nuclear productive capacities as well. The proliferators respond that the world's nuclear double-standard should not be fortified but eliminated: In the long run, either everyone should have the right to the fuel cycle—and for that matter to the bombs—or no one should. (This was the view of Pakistan and India until, in May 1998, they remedied the inequity in their own cases by testing nuclear weapons and declaring themselves nuclear powers.) Far more contentious is the new American military doctrine of pre-emptive war, aimed at stopping proliferation by force, as the United States said it sought to do by overthrowing the government of Iraq. Inasmuch as the Bush Administration has suggested that even nuclear force might be used, the new policy represents the ultimate extreme of the double standard: The United States will use nuclear weapons to stop other countries from getting those same weapons. The proliferators accordingly fear a world whose commanding heights will be guarded by the nuclear cannons of a few nations, while the rest of the world cowers in the planet's lowlands and back alleys. Nuclear disarmament, once the domain of the peace-loving, would become a prime engine of war in an imposed, militarized global order.

The debate between the nuclear haves and have-nots is probably unresolvable anytime soon. Certainly it will not be settled at the review conference. And yet, as is true of so many adversaries, the two groups of nations have more in common with each other than with other nations: They both want nuclear weapons. And if one looks at what is happening on the ground, a remarkable uniformity appears. All the parties in this quarrel are expanding their nuclear capacities and missions. In a sense the two groups, even as they threaten each other with annihilation, are cooperating in nuclearizing the globe. The end of the cold war was supposed to be the beginning of a farewell to nuclear danger, but now, fifteen years later, it's clear that a nuclear renaissance is under way. China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Britain are all increasing their arsenals and/or their delivery systems. (In an amazingly undernoticed development, the shadow of danger from Chinese nuclear weapons is falling over larger and larger areas of the United States.) The United States, even as it reduces the number of its alert nuclear weapons—though not the total number of nuclear weapons, alert or otherwise—is rotating its nuclear guns away from their traditional cold war targets and toward Third World sites. (The United States and Russia built up such an excess of nuclear bombs during the cold war that they can string out their dismantlement almost indefinitely without carving into their joint capacity to finish off most of human civilization.) Britain likewise is redirecting its targeting. Its Defense Secretary has stated that even the modest step of declaring no-first-use of nuclear weapons "would be incompatible with our and NATO's doctrine of deterrence, nor would it further nuclear disarmament objectives." In other words, Britain may find it necessary to initiate a nuclear war to achieve nuclear disarmament. Finally, individuals and terrorist groups are reaching for the bomb and other weapons of mass destruction. Osama bin Laden, for instance, has declared that obtaining such is the "religious duty" of Muslims, and September 11 gave us an example of how he might use them.

All but unheard in the snarling din are the true voices of peace—voices calling on the one group of nations to resist the demonic allure of nuclear arms and on the other group to rid themselves of the ones they have, leaving the world with a single standard: no nuclear weapons. Of the countries represented at the conference, fully 183 have found it entirely possible to live without atomic arsenals, and few—barring a breakdown of the treaty—show any sign of changing their minds. In the UN General Assembly the vast majority of them have voted regularly for nuclear abolition. Behind those votes stand the people of the world, who, when asked, agree. Even the people of the United States are in the consensus. Presented by AP pollsters in March with the statement, "No country should be allowed to have nuclear weapons," 66 percent agreed. In other countries, the percentage of supporters is higher. On the day their voices are heard and their will made active, the end of the nuclear age will be in sight.

Jonathan Schell is the Harold Willens Peace Fellow at The Nation Institute.

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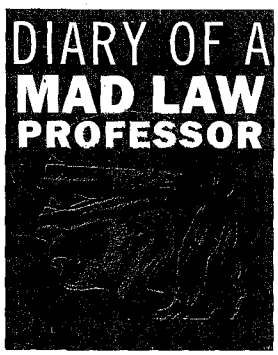
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Beyond the Pale



In *Virgin or Vamp*, Helen Benedict's classic study of rape, there is a list of factors that tend to determine the judicial outcome in cases of sexual assault. Conviction of any given defendant is much more likely, for example, if the victim does not know the assailant, if the victim is of a higher socioeconomic or educational level, if the victim is white and the assailant is not, if the victim is a middle-aged female or older, or if the victim has visible bruises or injuries. The flip side, of course, is that rapes between people who know each other are treated more indifferently by the public. The saddest of these cases are those involving parents, relatives, teachers, priests—great unforgivable breaches of fiduciary relationship—and children, many of whom are too traumatized to speak, too young to express themselves dependably or who are so neglected to begin with that no one notices or cares.

A recent study in Canada showed that children who are deemed "ugly" get much less attention from adults than do their more attractive peers. In the context of assaults on children, it's probably also an easy bet that older, minority and poor (factors that make anyone less "cute") children are generally less well attended than younger, white, "adorable" ones.

A few weeks ago, I heard a segment on PRI's always-interesting radio program *This American Life* featuring a meditation on the invisibility of Elizabeth Smart during her kidnapping. Narrated by a neighbor, the story pondered the veil of perception that prevented anyone from seeing her, even as she remained in their midst. The neighbor had actually seen her several times, walking with Brian David Mitchell, the deranged bigamist who had abducted her. Mitchell was a fixture around town. People apparently just assumed that he'd acquired "another wife," albeit a very young one. It is an ugly public secret, the reality of child brides among some Mormon fundamentalists.

And so Mitchell and his two "wives" walked through public squares and busy malls, right past the ubiquitous posters that featured Smart's face in happier times. Said one person, "We thought [he] would be a boogeyman" who "jumps out at you.... Mitchell stood right in front of us and sort of became invisible." Some people had even spoken to her directly during the time she was in Mitchell's thrall, but she never revealed her identity. Indeed, when the police finally found her, she flatly denied who she was at first. "He convinced her," they said. Mitchell "brainwashed her."

What was interesting about the program was that no one ever blamed Smart for their not seeing. The guilt lay squarely with the limits of their own vision. No one questioned why she never spoke. No one made an issue of her father's judgment in hiring Mitchell as a handyman before Smart was kidnapped. It was unusual in this sensationalistic age, a program focused on the culture of "trust" that blinded a community to the madman in their midst, that looked beyond its borders for the boogeyman. This is a very common human reaction, and I explore it not to question Smart's obvious status as a victim or the wisdom of her father's generosity. Rather, I want to think about the cases in which that does not happen, in which a community does not meditate upon its own failure to protect its children but rather blames only the children or the children's parents retrospectively. Smart's archetypal characteristics placed her, according to Helen Benedict's predictors, in a category for which the justice system is least likely to assume "vampishness." Indeed, Smart was the perfect picture of "attractive" victimhood: She played the harp like an angel and was wealthy and well-mannered.

With these sympathies in mind, it is worth isolating a few insights to hold on to in messier cases involving "uglier" alleged victims. First, Elizabeth Smart didn't tell us the truth. But rather than labeling her a liar, authorities pushed past that, perhaps remembering that minors are particularly susceptible to lying when they are in trouble or traumatized. They panic and tell strategic lies to survive, and if that trouble remains unaddressed, they grow into adults who lie. Susan Smith, who drowned her own children, was allegedly molested but not helped when she was young. Luckily in Smart's case, the "lie" was understood in the context of her greater trauma.

I am not trying to suggest that this realization at all resolves the question of criminal liability—it makes it even murkier, I suppose. But I am proposing that those of us who are not jurors rein in our voyeurism when confronted with the difficult realities of alleged sexual abuse. To heed Benedict's list, we need to be careful about dismissive preconceptions when either victim or assailant is poor or uneducated or "ugly" or a member of a minority—or when a victim falls within that relentlessly unheeded category, young boys, for whom victimhood is so often equated with sissyhood. As the trial of Michael Jackson lurches to its end, jurors can try—are we asking the impossible?—to mop up a mess whose tangled roots might be traceable back through years of looking the other way. But does anyone else remember when the young Michael Jackson claimed that his father abused him? Does anyone remember Michael Jackson actually going to a real school with other kids when he was young? Does anyone wonder what happened in the lives of those passive mothers who allowed Jackson to spend nights with their young sons? It is easy to conclude that they prostituted their children. It is harder to think that they, too, might have been paralyzed or damaged by some prior narrative of submission and obedience.

Finally, what do these cases teach us about not just celebrity but circus? The trial of Brian David Mitchell, unfolding at the same time as Jackson's, has its own potential for three-ring bizarreness—Mitchell has been removed from the courtroom four times for belting out hymns at top volume ("Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand")—but the media seem to have downplayed it and accorded the Smart family a cloak of respect. Can we accord those who are least cared for among us the honor of that simple human dignity? ■

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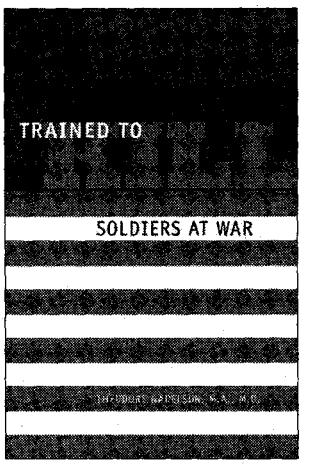

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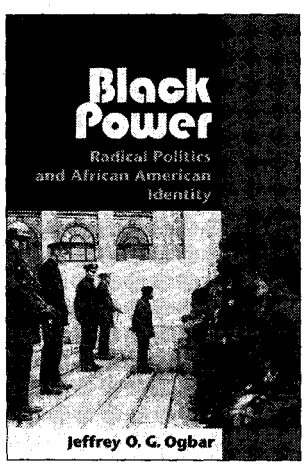

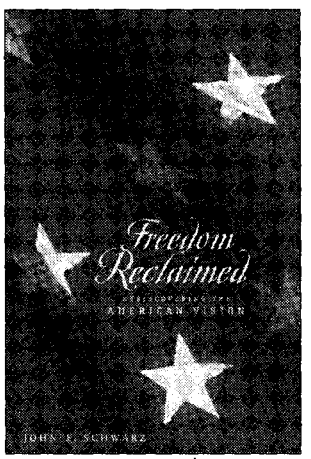

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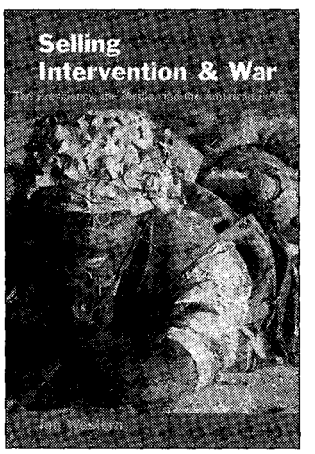

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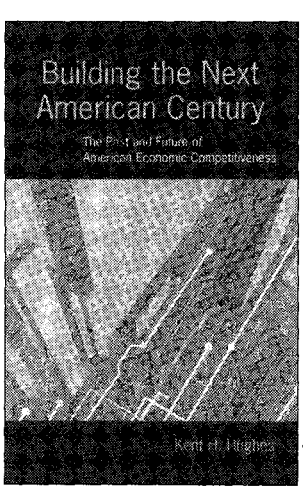

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ERIC ALTERMAN

What Would Dewey Do?

If you agree with John Dewey (and Jürgen Habermas) that democracy depends on a series of institutional arrangements that enable the public to form its own values and judgments on a variety of questions—and I do—then you cannot ignore the importance of civility in allowing these institutions to function. Without a foundation in civil society, the kinds of democratic exchange that allow a public to test its prejudices and, potentially, transcend them are literally impossible.

But the mores and institutions of civility can be a double-edged sword. By insisting on "keeping things civil," in polite society, repressive powers may suppress ugly truths about their conduct merely because raising them requires bad manners. I always thought it was a stroke of genius on the part of Robert McNamara to start crying at dinner parties in the late 1960s when someone raised the issue of Vietnam, as it preempted discussions of the deception and destruction for which he was responsible. Perhaps if McNamara had been confronted with some of the morally uncomfortable consequences of his policies, he might have worked harder to reverse them.

The pundit Robert Novak has never given the impression that he cared much for the values of civility. He regularly insults his political opponents and questions both their honesty and patriotism. The last time I appeared on television with Novak, he termed my politics to the "left of Khrushchev" and slandered my late journalistic mentor, I.F. Stone, as a Soviet spy. After I tried to call him on it, he refused to appear again with me and has not done so for the past twelve years.

Of course, these are relatively inconsequential matters compared with what Novak has done to former CIA agent Valerie Plame, as well as to his fellow journalists Matthew Cooper and Judith Miller. In the former case, Novak destroyed the career of a loyal public servant and potentially endangered US national security because—alone among six journalists contacted—he chose to play patsy for a Bush Administration scheme to punish her husband, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, by revealing her identity. (Wilson had investigated, and found wanting, Administration claims that the African nation of Niger had sold uranium to Iraq; he thereby undermined its case for war.)

Novak has also exposed two professional colleagues to possible jail sentences because he refuses to reveal the source of the Bush Administration leaker who played him so perfectly. Or perhaps he has testified about the leaker—or taken the Fifth Amendment; no one can be sure. Neither Novak nor the presiding judge in the case will say. While Novak has in the past deliberately burned a confidential source because he objected to the reason he was used—the Soviet spy Robert P. Hanssen, Novak said in 2001, "was merely using me to undermine [Attorney General Janet] Reno"—he will not do so in this case. Moreover, he explains, he does not really care about the fact that while he remains free to practice his trade, Miller and Cooper are looking at slammer time, pending a Supreme Court ruling. "I don't know why they're upset with me," Novak told C-SPAN's Brian Lamb. "They ought to worry about themselves. I worry about myself."

As Amy Sullivan recently demonstrated in a *Washington Monthly* profile, much of Novak's journalistic career has taken place in a similarly insulated ethics-free zone. He regularly praises books published by the right-wing publishing house Regnery, without informing readers and viewers that his son, Alex, is in charge of the company's publicity. Nor does he let them in on the news of his business relationship with the owner of the company, Tom Phillips, who also owns Eagle Publishing, which distributes the "Evans-Novak Political Report," available to subscribers for an annual $297 rate.

Novak is allowed to get away with these and other ethical transgressions for two reasons. The first is that like so many conservatives, he is able to deflect criticism as alleged liberal media bias—an accusation that is belied by his very ubiquitousness in that media. But the second thing Novak has going for him is his ability to exploit the governing rules of journalistic civility despite his unwillingness to follow them himself. Both CNN and the *Post* have given him a pass, or worse. Wolf Blitzer felt compelled to tell viewers, "All of us who know Bob Novak know he's one of the best reporters in the business and has been for nearly half a century." His guest, Novak's editor at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Steve Huntley, termed him "one of the best reporters in this country." *Capital Gang* panelist Al Hunt told Sullivan he "conspicuously avoided the topic" on the air because Novak is "a close friend." So has just about everyone else. (Even Hunt, however, could not help but express surprise when Novak opined on the show that CBS should be compelled to reveal its sources with regard to *60 Minutes*' botched exposé on Bush's draft deferment.)

On May 25, the 5th Annual Arthur N. Rupe Great Debate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, however, will feature yours truly debating Robert Novak on "The American News Media—Liberal or Conservative Bias?"

It's the first time he's agreed to appear with me since 1992. What would you do? What would Dewey do?

* * *

Update: In my cover story two weeks ago, I called on media representatives to respond collectively to the Bush Administration's assault on their right to inform the public of its actions. In fact, half a dozen Washington bureau chiefs held a meeting with White House press secretary Scott McClellan on April 29 to ask that reporters' briefings be held on the record, rather than "on background" with an anonymous briefer. They have also asked their colleagues to make a concerted effort to convince all officials to speak on the record, for attribution. There is talk, also, of a boycott of such briefings in the future, but so far no action. ■

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ARTICLES

RADIO WAVES

CONFESSIONS OF A RADIO FREAK

GARRISON KEILLOR

I am old enough to be nostalgic about radio, having grown up when it was a stately medium and we listened to *Journeys in Musicland* with Professor E.B. "Pop" Gordon teaching us the musical scale, and the guest on *The Poetry Corner* was Anna Hempstead Branch, who read her sonnet cycle, "Ere the Golden Bowl Is Broken," and the gospel station brought us *Gleanings From the Word*, with the whispery Reverend Riley trudging patiently through the second chapter of Leviticus, and at night there were Fibber and Molly and Amos and Andy and the *Sunset Valley Barn Dance* with Pop Wiggins ("Says here that radio's gonna take the place of newspapers. I doubt it. Y'can't swat a fly with a radio."), but I don't feel a hankering to hear any of it ever again. I am rather fond of radio as it is today, full of oddities and exceptions. It is an unmanageable medium. Management is at work trying to format things, but reality keeps breaking through the bars. You twiddle the dial, and in the midst of the clamor and blare and rackety commercials you find a human being speaking to you in a way that intrigues you and lifts your spirits, such as a few weeks ago when a man spoke about his mother, in Houston, who as she was dying of lung cancer made a video for her severely retarded daughter to watch in years to come, which the daughter does not watch, being too retarded to comprehend death, which in itself is a mercy. It was very graceful, a fellow American telling a story unlike all the other stories. Pretty amazing. And all the more so for showing up on a dial full of blathering idiots and jackhammer music.

My taste is catholic; I don't go looking for people like me (earnest liberal English majors). I am a fan of the preachers on little AM stations in early morning and late at night who sit in a tiny studio in Alabama or Tennessee and patiently explain the imminence of the Second Coming—I grew up with good preaching, and it is an art that, unlike anything I find in theaters, has the power to shake me to my toes. And gospel music is glorious beyond words. I love the mavericks and freethinkers and obsessives who inhabit the low-power FM stations—the feminist bluegrass show, the all-Sinatra show, the Yiddish vaudeville show. Once, on the Merritt Parkway heading for New York, I came upon *The American Atheist Hour*, the sheer tedium of which was wildly entertaining—there's nobody so humorless as a devout atheist.

I love the great artists of public radio who simulate spontaneity so beautifully they almost fool me—Terry Gross, Ira Glass, the *Car Talk* brothers—all carefully edited and shaped, but big as life on the radio, smarter than hell, cooler than cucumbers. I love the good-neighbor small-town radio of bake sales and Rotary meetings and Krazy Daze and livestock reports and Barb calling in to report that Pookie was found and thanks to everybody who was on the lookout for her. Good-neighbor radio used to be everywhere and was especially big in big cities—WGN in Chicago, WCCO in Minneapolis–St. Paul, WOR in New York, KOA in Denver, KMOX in St. Louis, KSL in Salt Lake City—where avuncular men chatted about fishing and home repair and other everyday things and Library Week was observed and there was live coverage of a tornado or a plane crash and on summer nights you heard the ball game. Meanwhile lawn mowers were sold and skin cream and dairy goods and flights to Acapulco.

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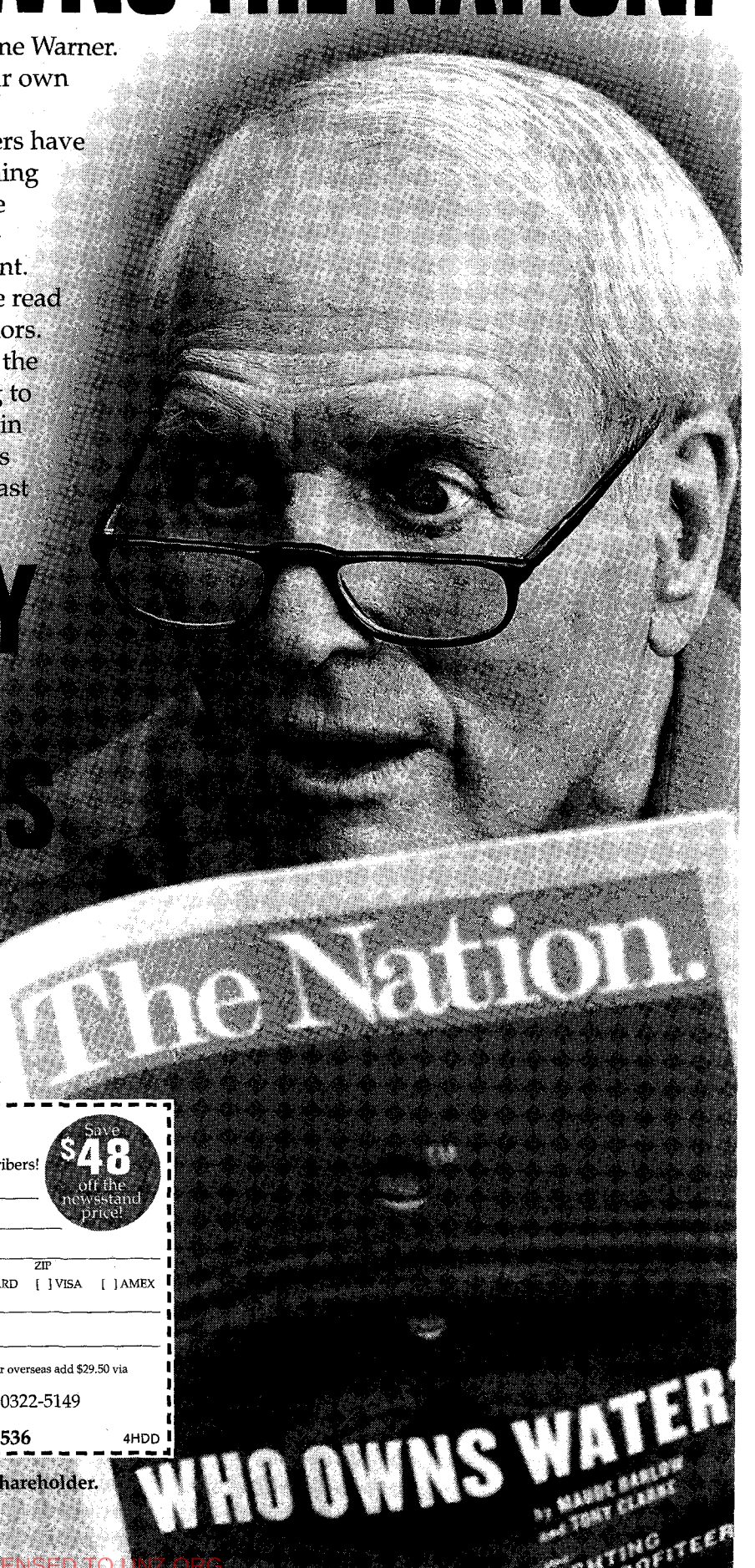

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Paul Newman is a longstanding *Nation* reader and shareholder.

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The deregulation of radio was tough on good-neighbor radio because Clear Channel and other conglomerates were anxious to vacuum up every station in sight for fabulous sums of cash and turn them into robot repeaters. I dropped in to a broadcasting school last fall and saw kids being trained for radio careers as if radio were a branch of computer processing. They had no conception of the possibility of talking into a microphone to an audience that wants to hear what you have to say. I tried to suggest what a cheat this was, but the instructor was standing next to me. Clear Channel's brand of robotics is not the future of broadcasting. With a whole generation turning to iPod and another generation discovering satellite radio and Internet radio, the robotic formatted-music station looks like a very marginal operation indeed. Training kids to do that is like teaching typewriter repair.

After the iPod takes half the radio audience and satellite radio subtracts half of the remainder and Internet radio gets a third of the rest and Clear Channel has to start cutting its losses and selling off frequencies, good-neighbor radio will come back. People do enjoy being spoken to by other people who are alive and who live within a few miles of you.

People like Tommy Mischke, a nighttime guy on a right-wing station in St. Paul and a free spirit who gets into wonderful stream-of-consciousness harangues and meditations that are a joy to listen to compared with the teeth-grinding that goes on around him. Not that teeth-grinders are to be disparaged: I enjoy, in small doses, the over-the-top right-wingers who have leaked into AM radio on all sides in the past twenty years. They are evil, lying, cynical bastards who are out to destroy the country I love and turn it into a banana republic, but hey, nobody's perfect. And now that their man is re-elected and they have nice majorities in the House and Senate, they are hunters in search of diminishing prey. There just aren't many of us liberals worth banging away at, but God bless them, they keep on coming. Just the other day, I heard one foaming and raging about the right to life and about liberals preying on the helpless—I realized he was talking about Terri Schiavo—and then he launched into the judiciary and how they had stood by and done nothing. He held their feet to the fire for a while and then he tore into George McGovern for about five minutes. George McGovern is a kindly, grandfatherly man who lives in Mitchell, South Dakota, and winters in Florida and every year attends his World War II bomber squadron reunion. He ran for President in 1972. His connection to the Florida case is tenuous at best. When you go ballistic over 1972, you are truly desperate to fill time.

The reason you find an army of right-wingers ratcheting on the radio and so few liberals is simple: Republicans are in need of affirmation, they don't feel comfortable in America and they crave listening to people who think like them. Liberals actually enjoy living in a free society; tuning in to hear an echo is not our idea of a good time. I go to church on Sunday morning to be among the like-minded, and we all say the Nicene Creed together and assume nobody has his fingers crossed, but when it comes to radio, I prefer oddity and crankiness. I don't need someone to tell me that George W. Bush is a deceitful, corrupt, clever and destructive man—that's pretty clear on the face of it. What I want is to be surprised and delighted and moved. Here at the low end of the FM dial is a show in which three college boys are sitting in a studio, whooping and laughing, sneering at singer-songwriters they despise, playing Eminem and a bunch of bands I've never heard of, and they're having so much fun they achieve weightlessness—utter unself-consciousness—and then one of them tosses out the f-word and suddenly they get scared, wondering if anybody heard. Wonderful. Or you find three women in a studio yakking rapid-fire about the Pitt-Aniston divorce and the Michael Jackson trial and the botoxing of various stars and who wore what to the Oscars. It's not my world, and I like peering into it. The sports talk station gives you a succession of men whose absorption in a fantasy world is, to me, borderline insane. You're grateful not to be related to any of them, and yet ten minutes of their ranting and wheezing is a real tonic that somehow makes this world, the world of trees and children and books and travel, positively tremble with vitality. And then you succumb to weakness and tune in to the geezer station and there's Roy Orbison singing "Dream Baby" and you join Roy on the chorus, one of the Roylettes.

I don't worry about the right-wingers on AM radio. They are talking to an audience that is stuck in rush-hour traffic, in whom road rage is mounting, and the talk shows divert their rage from the road to the liberal conspiracy against America. Instead of ramming your rear bumper, they get mad at Harry Reid. Yes, the wingers do harm, but the worst damage is done to their own followers, who are cheated of the sort of genuine experience that enables people to grow up. The best of what you find on public radio is authentic experience. It has little to do with politics. The US Marine just returned from Sudan with lots of firsthand impressions of the crisis there; the journalist just back from Falluja, where he spent three months; a firsthand documentary about life aboard the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis in the Middle East—that's what Edward R. Murrow did from London in 1940, and it's still golden today. It's the glorious past and it's the beautiful future. (Thanks to the Internet, the stuff doesn't vanish into thin air. You can go to thislife.org and get the story of the Houston woman or the aircraft carrier documentary. You can find the Sudan and Falluja interviews at whyy.org/freshair. More and more people are doing this. Nobody cares what Rush Limbaugh said two days ago; it's gone and forgotten, but the Internet has become an enormous extension of radio.) That's why public radio is growing by leaps and bounds. It is hospitable to scholars of all stripes and to travelers who have returned from the vast, unimaginable world with stories to tell. Out here in the heartland, we live for visitors like those. We will make the demented uncle shut up so we can listen to somebody who actually knows something. ■

Garrison Keillor is the host of A Prairie Home Companion *on public radio on Saturday evenings.*

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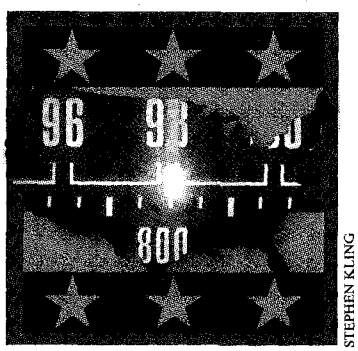
LAUNCHED LAST YEAR ON A WING AND A PRAYER, IT'S STILL ALOFT AND GAINING ALTITUDE.

Calling Air America

NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN

A year ago March, Air America, the liberal/progressive talk-radio network, took off from New York into the wild blue yonder with an HBO documentary film crew in the cockpit and a mighty blast of publicity acting as a tail wind. The craft was barely airborne before it hit turbulence. Its Los Angeles and Chicago outlets pulled the plug on the fledgling network over money squabbles. Paychecks were late, rumors abounded, the original set of pilots left, to be replaced by others. The plane, it turned out, had been allowed to take off with an insufficient fuel load—meaning working capital—and was going to have to be refueled in midflight, never an easy operation.



STEPHEN KLING

The frail craft, though buffeted by violent winds and sudden air pockets, stayed aloft. Now flying into its second year, Air America says it has enough new investor money to stay airborne at least until we hear otherwise. Stations in some fifty cities are broadcasting the network's programming nineteen hours every weekday with repeats and additional programming on the weekends.

As of this writing Air America is still not yet back on the air in Chicago, but it has returned to Los Angeles, where, given the number of very rich, very liberal people, silence would have been next to fatal. When asked about what it cost to return to Los Angeles, Danny Goldberg, Air America's new CEO, did a small leap over the question and replied, "We're certainly going to spend a lot less money to get profitability than Rupert Murdoch spent to launch Fox News or the *New York Post*. It's not going to cost as much money to get a self-sustaining vehicle on the left as it did on the right, but it costs some money to start a new business, whether it's ideological or nonideological."

Goldberg, who comes to the network after a long career in the music business, predicts Air America will start taking in more than it's paying out by the end of 2006, a tall order if it has to buy its way onto stations in other major metro areas. The most common arrangement in the industry is that a syndicator or, in this instance, a network supplies the programming in return for which a station allots it a certain amount of air time for broadcasting whatever ads it can sell. However, Air America is half business, half crusade and thus cannot be judged by conventional measures.

Goldberg himself is part businessman and part red-hot. He is not one of your modern mumbling liberals who isn't sure he wants people to know what his opinions are. He shouts them with a self-assured truculence. "To some establishment Democrats, it is people like me who have screwed up the party," he says. "I was against the war in Iraq, and I met with and supported Howard Dean in the early stages of the primary campaign. I have been involved with political fundraising concerts, I'm an ACLU board member and I'm a friend of Michael Moore. To me, it is the conventional wisdom prevailing in Washington that has screwed up the party."

Regardless of who screwed up what, Air America has some building to do before it becomes a business success or a political force. Before April, when Jerry Springer, the redoubtable TV personality, became one of Air America's barking seals, Al Franken, the network's star personality, had been on fewer than 10 percent of the number of stations carrying Rush Limbaugh. Springer could cause the number of network affiliates to jump, but some think Air America will still struggle as long as it tries to be a lefty network instead of a lefty syndicator. "Ultimately syndicating individual shows is the way it works. Networks are not a viable method of dealing in the radio broadcasting industry with talk shows," says Michael Harrison, publisher of *Talkers* magazine and the wise old owl of the business.

A disagreement over network versus syndicating was one of the reasons for the birth of Air America's progressive talk competitor, Democracy Radio, based in Washington. "The founders of Democracy Radio and the founders of Air America all originally started as one organization back in the fall of 2002," explains Tom Athans, that organization's executive director.

Democracy Radio, which for the nonce has only two nationally syndicated programs, broadcasting a combined six hours a week, is on about twice as many stations as Air America. It also has associated with it a bundle of people with much experience in radio, including Frank Mankiewicz, the father of NPR news. "Syndication is the way of the future. The network is the way of the past," says Mankiewicz, who explains that syndicators have a built-in advantage: It's a lot easier to sell a station one or two programs than nineteen straight hours of programming.

The two groups fell out over differences in "approach," which included more than the business plan. While saying that both have the same progressive point of view, Athans explains that Air America was "very big on creating a splash with celebrities, and our belief was celebrities in the long run don't make as big a splash as real broadcasters do. If you want to be successful in broadcasting, use experienced broadcasters."

Another point of difference is that Democracy Radio is not banking on coming up with a liberal Limbaugh, a national personality so vivid and so well-known that even the millions who do not listen to talk-radio are at least vaguely familiar with the person's name, as they are with Limbaugh's. So Athans's organization is finding and placing liberal talkers in various cities.

Nicholas von Hoffman is the author of the forthcoming A Devil's Dictionary of Business: Monkey Business; High Finance and Low; Money, the Making, Losing and Printing Thereof; Commerce; Trade; Clever Tricks; Tours de Force; Globalism and Globaloney; Industry; Invention; the Stock Market; Marvelous Explanations and Clarifications; All Presented With Wit and Attitude *(Nation Books)*.

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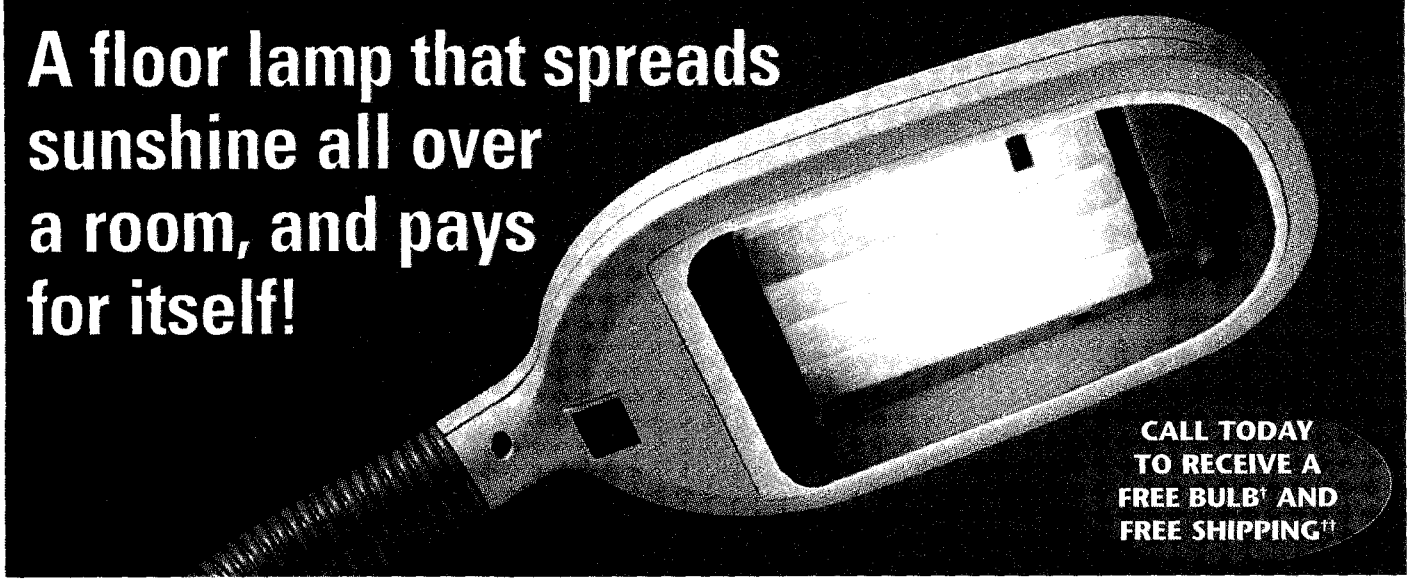

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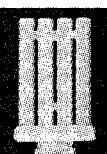

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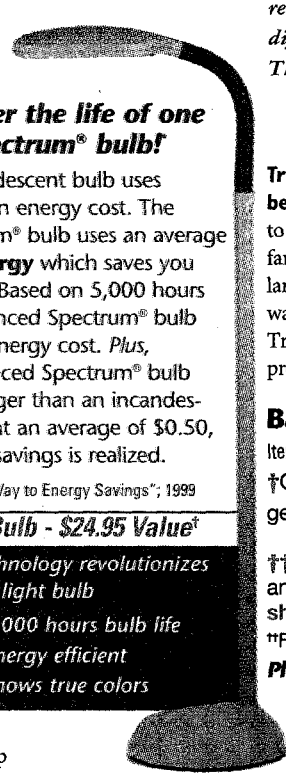

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They are expected to build up a fierce following in their locales. The first such is Nancy Skinner, an experienced talker who was brought back to her native Michigan from WLS in Chicago and installed at Detroit's WDTW to do a morning drive-time show. There are supposed to be a score more like Skinner dropped into major markets soon. Since the rule of thumb is that it takes about three years for a talk personality to start turning a profit, this is going to cost nonprofit Democracy Radio a ton of seed money, but Athans insists there are checkbooks out and ready, although he will not say whose.

A few talkers—maybe it's only one—are carrying the liberal torch in deepest Boondockia without benefit of network, syndicator or checkbook. Louie Free, whose voice can be heard every weekday morning across the Mahoning Valley on WASN, Youngstown, Ohio, is, with his faithful, Sancho Panza–like producer, Bun-E, a discordant progressive voice in a state where the word of God is said to drown out all others. But not that of the uncompromising Free, who has been fired from several stations in the area for his opposition to former Congressman James Traficant Jr., presently residing in a federal home for wayward politicians near Ray Brook, New York.

'To say that only conservative people would listen to talk-radio...is just naïve and misguided.'
—Gabe Hobbs, Clear Channel vice president

The problematic Jerry Springer and Louie Free aside, two men are vying for the lead in liberal AM yak-yak: Democracy Radio's Ed Schultz, a side o' beef radio personality out of Fargo, North Dakota, and Air America's Franken. Schultz is a boomer, a fast-talking, ham-fisted, quick-paced table banger with years of radio experience and a perfected technique. Franken is an accomplished comedian, a famous writer and liberal headliner who puts on a friendly, slow, NPR-paced radio performance that stamps him as someone who has either not yet learned to be an AM talker or has decided to succeed by being a different kind of talker.

TV is a cool medium, exemplified in action by the late Johnny Carson (or Jay Leno), and radio is a hot one, exemplified by—who else?—Rush Limbaugh. It remains to be seen if the cerebral Franken, with his cerebral guests ambling cerebrally up the high road, will make it in the long run. Whether he or Springer, a coolish TV type also, are or aren't hits, Air America has a peppery veteran performer in Randi Rhodes, who non-cerebrally drove cerebral interview guest Ralph Nader out of the studio with a high-decibel, high-speed verbal barrage against his candidacy. Rhodes came to Air America after years of successful GOP-bashing on a Miami station, although she is an old-school New York wisenheimer with a polished technique who can seethe on air with the best of 'em.

What some of the other Air America regulars may lack in hours logged in front of the microphone they make up for in the energy with which they hurl themselves at their listeners. Mark Maron, one of the performers on Air America's *Morning Sedition* program, whiles the early hours away attacking right-wing malefactors with such epithets as "douche-bag," "zombie" and, my favorite, "Christo-fascist." Nor is Maron, who first bloomed as a stand-up comic, the only hyperenergized lefty swinging brass knuckles for the Air America lineup.

Later on in the day you can hear movie actress Janeane Garofalo behaving like a confused avenging liberal angel or venomous pixie, depending on your tastes and politics. I was lucky enough to tune in on Garofalo one day when she was discoursing on "ass babies." Ass babies are infants conceived by buttfucking young women who will do anything of a sexual nature except have their hymens broken by a marauding penis before marriage to, presumably, a person of another gender.

Doubtless there is an audience for such discussions, but how big it may be and whether its members vote is yet to be established. Before the arrival of Democracy Radio and Air America it was a settled truth that AM talk-radio was right-wing territory and that portsiders who tried to muscle in would fail.

This being the case, some people assumed Air America was an election-year stunt that would disappear after the Democratic defeat last November. Lefty radio was considered an impossible thing, Danny Goldberg explains, because it was thought that "liberal ideas were too nuanced, that anger is what fuels conservatism in a unique way, that liberalism was elitist and that talk-radio was populist. That turned out to be completely untrue." Assuredly no one is going to accuse Garofalo and Maron of over-nuancification. Franken is a known and named nuancer and we have yet to see what kind of a talker Springer will be, but the guy is a clever politician, able to adapt his tactics to his needs.

In some form or other, progressive talk is here to stay. "I'm sure my mother and father said there could never be such a thing as rock-and-roll radio in 1958, no one would listen to that quote unquote crap on the air," says Gabe Hobbs, a vice president in charge of programming for Clear Channel Communications, which owns more than 1,200 radio stations, including twenty-eight that carry Air America. "To say that only conservative people would listen to talk-radio and a discussion of important issues and cultural issues and things of this nature is just naïve and misguided."

Once upon a time, Hobbs will tell you, liberals held their own in talk-radio. "Talk-radio has been largely conservative for the last fifteen years, but that has nothing to do with what people are willing to consume. It just sort of evolved that way. Prior to 1988 talk-radio was largely liberal. In 1988 Rush Limbaugh comes along and is an overnight wild success. What happens is there're 500 guys out there the next day trying to imitate what he did, and suddenly it's a conservative medium. Oh, wow! Let's all do it, and so we all did it. I'm not saying it was wrong. We made a nice living doing it."

Hobbs has a simple calculation that predicts a minimum level of commercial success for lib-lab talkathons. "In radio, let's say you go into a market that's considered to be a 'conservative,' red-state area. It's still going to have maybe 40 percent Democratic registration. If I get just 1 or 2 percent of that constituency to listen to the station, it's a huge, wildly successful radio station." To nail the point down he adds, "I have yet to see a major US radio market that was all conservative or all liberal. That's like saying in Boise, Idaho, they don't like rock music; they'll only listen to country. Maybe country is the number-one station there, but I'm

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guessing there are some rock-and-roll fans as well."

Even so, nothing is automatic. As Harrison of *Talkers* points out, "It's a tough business even when you serve a need. It's a tough business for conservatives, it's a tough business for liberals, it's a tough business for pet shows, it's a tough business for doctor shows, it's just a tough business."

Harrison is referring to getting the audience that gets the advertising that keeps a program on the air. He's not discussing political impact. "This is a business proposition. I'm not out to promote some agenda, get federal judges appointed or anything like that. I'm trying to run a business here, trying to make a fair profit," explains Hobbs. Air America does have Dr. Scholl's, Geico and American Express, but from what I've heard, most of the ads are low status and, one assumes, low-priced. Let's face it, how much is Proton, the one-hour erection pill with horny goat weed extract, prepared to pay?

There's another question. You and I may be tolerant, fully nuanced elitists who have been known to pop a horny-goat-weed pill from time to time, but coupled with Springer's reputation and Garofalo's mouth, is there a danger that Air America may be a hit among a white-boy, 14-to-24 demographic and Smut America to political fence sitters in Ohio, Washington and New Mexico? Air America could be, using the Hobbs formula, a commercial success and a political zero. No one can say how large the ass-baby vote is, but on the face of things it does not seem probable that it will elect many Democratic senators. Besides, Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* already do what they want to do better. Goldberg has no fear of such things. He sees something new stirring in the boonies. He says that progressive radio needs to "address the culture that's been emerging with things like MoveOn.org and the people who went to see *Fahrenheit 9/11* and bought Al Franken's books."

Air America may have tapped into a new and vital stratum of political thought and activity, but even if it loses itself in its own smog, Democracy Radio will not. Ed Schultz is not going to play the game of hipper-than-thou, so even if Air America does wander off into a cul-de-sac of its own devising—and it may not—there will be other, straight liberal shows. Jon Sinton, Air America's president of programming, says all the arrows on newest-audience surveys are steeply up. "They're just radio hosts, primarily entertainers," Michael Harrison reminds us, "entertainers with political and social impact." But how much, and how telling, is the impact they have? A widely used set of figures of uncertain reliability has it that every week the national air is drenched with 40,000 hours of right-wing yak-yak, as compared with a mere 3,000 hours of left-wing palaver. Those hundreds of thousands of conservative talk hours must surely have had some impact, but was it to make new conservatives or was it to whip up the foam in the mouths of inveterate right-wingers?

With a 40-to-3 lead, right-wing radio must have made a major contribution to the conservative atmospherics that we've been choking in for years. A man like Rush Limbaugh has grown rich and famous, the two qualities we have the most respect for—if he's so rich, he must be smart. His top-ten, bestseller success lends additional weight to what he stands for, enabling him to dominate the landscape as *New York Review of Books* writers never will. As was the case with reactionary radio some years ago, left-wing radio is good at finding and exposing villains and villainy; it is deft

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at unearthing conspiracies, real and not so real; it is developing a rich vocabulary of invective, all of which is useful. People need to read and hear their opinions and beliefs shouted back at them. They need to know that they are not alone.

Thousands of hours of liberal blabbery on hundreds of stations will go part of the way toward changing the impression that this is a right-wing world, that reaction is the default setting and that anything to the left of Tom DeLay is a foreign, New York kind of idea. Reactionaries must not be allowed to make all the noise, but lib-lab noise-making will not assure the winning of elections. It can make liberalism respectable in the eyes of the impressionable, feckless, white-collar American masses; it can validate it, but it will not put a lefty in the White House any more than Limbaugh and his clonish imitators captured Congress for Jesus and the big-money people in 1994. He helped, but untold numbers can't stand listening to call-in programs. They find hearing talk-radio—left, right or center—akin to having a tooth drilled. All the callithumpian, pot-walloping noise in the world will not break liberalism out of the ghetto in which it is currently confined. Not alone. Not by itself.

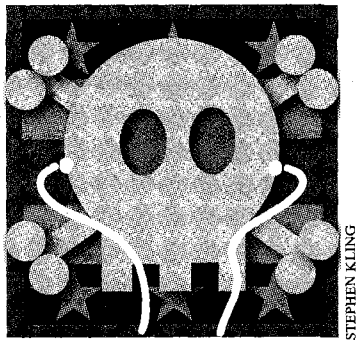
Progressive talk-radio has to be *for* something. You can't live off a straight diet of political paranoia. Liberalism has to have its thrilling moments, its heroes. It has to have a platform, a positive agenda, a program. But the invention of same is not the job of a small group of overwrought men and women leaning into microphones. When liberalism and liberals do find their platform, their new, progressive talkers will surely broadcast it. And if all will not be good, it will be better than it has been. ■

THE ONCE-HUNTED OUTLAW OF LOW-POWER RADIO IS NOW A HERO—INCLUDING AT THE FCC.

Prometheus Unbound

RICK KARR

For a guy whose pirate radio collective had been busted six times by the Federal Communications Commission and who still goes by an illegal broadcaster's nom de air, Pete Tridish looked unusually at ease at a February hearing inside the commission's Washington headquarters. He and a few dozen other activists had gathered for LPFM Day, a morning's worth of informal hearings on the state of new low-power community FM radio stations. All five commissioners—Democrat and Republican—greeted them and praised their efforts to give more Americans access to the airwaves. And just as the event got started, Senator John McCain of Arizona introduced a bill that would expand the number of low-power FM licenses.



STEPHEN KLING

Contrast that with the situation in the late 1990s, when the FCC made six visits to Radio Mutiny, *a k a* West Philadelphia Pirate Radio, or WPPR, the pirate station that Tridish and a few other activists ran out of the back room of a former squat. The chief of the commission's Compliance and Information Bureau came from Washington to lead the final raid himself. He sat down behind the mike, announced on the air that the station was closed, then seized its equipment.

That bust catalyzed Radio Mutiny's metamorphosis into the Prometheus Radio Project. Over the intervening seven years, Prometheus came to play a prominent role in the media reform movement: In the late 1990s the group lobbied for new community licenses. Once the FCC started issuing them, Prometheus helped build several of the most successful new stations and train volunteer staff. And Prometheus was the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit that stopped in its tracks then–FCC chairman Michael Powell's efforts to further deregulate the ownership of broadcast stations. The pirates had become players.

The Prometheus Radio Project's headquarters is three rooms in the basement of West Philadelphia's Calvary United Methodist Church, across the street from the former squat that served as Radio Mutiny's studio and where Tridish still lives. Inside the office, shelves sag under the weight of boxes that bulge with electronic odds and ends, wires protruding. Some of the office's computers look like they've been cobbled together from those parts. The walls are covered with posters that assail the corporate media and photos that document pranksterish protests. It's a tiny operation: Tridish is one of only four paid staffers. When the group ran out of grant money last year, he went on unemployment. "That's why I sometimes call Prometheus a public-private partnership," he says.

One of the other full-time staffers, Hannah Sassaman, says the group's broad aim is to reform the broadcast media as a whole. But "our strategy is to focus on something that's winnable—low-power FM—and that no one else really is specializing in. We want the new stations to serve as an example for other groups who might use a more appropriate technology in their particular communities"—technologies like the Internet, or even cable television.

Prometheus doesn't build or operate stations. That's done by the community organizations to which the FCC grants licenses. Instead, the Philadelphia group is a clearinghouse for technical, organizational, regulatory and financial information. Tridish gives advice to the scores of community groups that applied for LPFM licenses in 2000 and 2001 but whose applications are still stuck in the FCC bureaucracy. He and Sassaman also advise stations that have already been licensed on raising money, build-

Rick Karr, a Brooklyn journalist, reports regularly on culture and technology on public television and radio.

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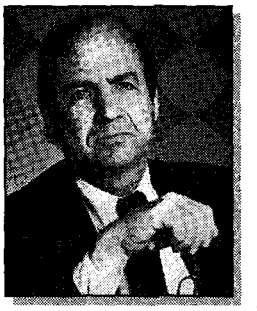

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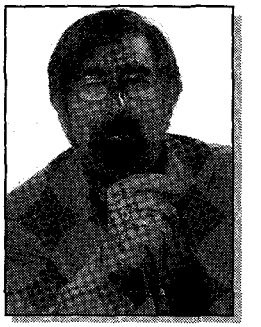
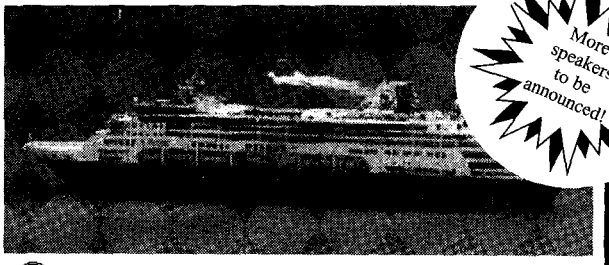


Robert Scheer
Contributing Editor, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Nation*

Date	Day	Ports of Call	Arrive	Depart
Nov. 12	Sat	San Diego, CA		5:00 PM
Nov. 13	Sun	Day at Sea		
Nov. 14	Mon	Cabo San Lucas, Mexico	8:00 AM	4:00 PM
Nov. 15	Tue	Mazatlán, Mexico	8:00 AM	6:00 PM
Nov. 16	Wed	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico	8:00 AM	10:00 PM
Nov. 17	Thu	Day at Sea		
Nov. 18	Fri	Day at Sea		
Nov. 19	Sat	San Diego, CA	8:00 AM	



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ing stations and staying on the air. Then there are the "LPFM barn raisings," weekend-long events organized by Prometheus during which dozens of volunteers converge on a station that's about to go on the air. Tridish and Sassaman train volunteers and help build studios and raise antenna masts.

Tridish says "community" is more important than "radio." "What's important isn't the box that broadcasts the radio. What matters is the social structures that evolve." He says that's why Prometheus calls the events barn raisings: "It used to be that if you wanted to build a barn, you had to be at least on speaking terms with all your neighbors. You had to go out and say, 'Hey, my barn burned down last week. Could y'all come out and help? We'll feed you.' Now what do you do? You go in to your job, make a lot of money, hire a crane and they put it up for you. What these community radio stations do is bring people together. Those are the sorts of public community institutions that I think need to exist in order to counter the power that corporations have now."

'What's important isn't the box that broad casts the radio. What matters is the social structures that evolve.' —Pete Tridish

Prometheus won't help the single biggest category of LPFM stations, those licensed to fundamentalist religious groups. When one of them calls, Sassaman refers them to Prometheus's opposite number in the religious world, the Christian Community Broadcasters. "We only work with fundamentalists on matters of common interest," Tridish says, "like passing legislation and changing regulations that will benefit both community radio and fundamentalist stations. It's not our mission to build stations for fundamentalists, so we don't do it, especially since there is someone else whose mission it is to do it." Prometheus has even actively opposed applications by a group of fundamentalist stations—under the name Calvary Chapel—that, Tridish and others suggest, were submitting hundreds of applications in hopes of creating a nationwide network, instead of the community outlets the FCC intended. Radio itself is a kind of religion in the Prometheus offices. "It's a democratic medium," Sassaman says. "You can take a radio apart and figure out how it works. Everyone has a radio in their home, and they're going to continue to for the next fifty years. The power of that to people living outside the Internet world is staggering and I think not clear anymore to broadcasters, community members, organizers and the government. Radio is far from dead."

But some of Prometheus's neighbors in Philadelphia—sympathetic neighbors, at that—take issue with that sentiment. "As much as I love terrestrial radio, there are limits to the things you can do with it," says Bruce Schimmel, a longtime public broadcaster and former editor and publisher of Philadelphia's free weekly the *City Paper*. "When it comes down to it, the only people it's going to affect are people in rural areas. The radio spectrum is already too crowded, and the signals just won't carry."

Schimmel says he likes Prometheus—especially the energy and enthusiasm that Tridish and Sassaman bring to their efforts—but he wishes it would join the struggle to roll out wireless municipal broadband in Philadelphia. "There's no question that the best way to reach a lot of people and promote democracy is through radio, but what the Internet taught us is that if there's an obstacle, you simply work around it," he says. "Podcasting is the way to do that now, not radio."

Tridish says he'd love to bring some kind of wireless (WiFi) network to the West Philly neighborhood where he first helped set up a pirate station, but he doesn't think that's where Prometheus should focus its efforts. Besides, he says, WiFi networks don't stir the romantic ardor that radio stations do. "You can find three or four wing nuts in every town who are gonna make it their life's work to build a community radio station," he says. "Sometimes people at the grassroots don't have the giant, expansive policy understanding of the hot technology—what's gonna come, what's gonna go—but people know what they want to do. People want to communicate."

Pete Tridish (as in Petri Dish) wasn't always interested in media reform. He didn't always go by the pseudonym, either. The two changes happened at around the same point. As a teenager in Brooklyn, when he was still known as Dylan Wrynn, he envisioned himself becoming a scientist. But he burned out on the competitive atmosphere at New York's prestigious Stuyvesant High School. Inspired by physicist Michio Kaku's opposition to the Star Wars antimissile program, he joined the antinuclear movement, then the antiapartheid struggle. At Antioch College he interned for environmental and housing groups. After graduating, he moved to Philadelphia and stayed active. But something wasn't working right.

"Every single campaign I had ever worked on—we might've learned how to hold up a sign and got five seconds on the news by shouting something that rhymed, but we could never get taken seriously," he says. Their opponents did, however. "The next day, they would be on *MacNeil/Lehrer*, and all their policy wonks would say why we were a bunch of idiots. I started to realize that there was a very serious problem of media ownership and control." Wrynn decided that media reform was a kind of grand unified field theory of progressive activism. "Working against the domination of media by a handful of corporations was the key to supporting all the issues I'd worked on before."

Wrynn and his fellow West Philly activists didn't have much more than the theory until they heard the story of Stephen Dunifer, who launched Free Radio Berkeley in 1993 by climbing into the hills above the California city with a transmitter in his backpack. The FCC fined Dunifer $20,000. He fought the fine and articulated the core arguments of the nascent media reform movement: that media conglomerates had abandoned public service and left local communities voiceless, and that low-power broadcasting could give that voice back.

The FCC asked a federal district court to shut down Dunifer's station, but the gambit backfired: The court instead asked the FCC to justify its regulations. Dunifer stayed on the air while the case ground through the courts. Meanwhile, he sold low-power transmitter kits assembled at home and urged civil disobedience—in essence, sit-ins on the public airwaves.

The West Philly group bought a kit and threw the parts together. It didn't work. They "stared at it a lot," Tridish says. They lost parts. Things blew up.

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A copy of *Rebel Radio: The Story of El Salvador's Radio Venceremos*, an oral history of the FMLN guerrillas' own pirate operation, jolted them out of their electronic torpor. "These guys—some of them had no education. And they ran a radio station for eleven years without missing a single day."

When the whole group had read the book, Wrynn says, they chastised themselves: "God, we're lame! We live in the world of Radio Shacks and the Internet, and we can't even figure out how to make this radio station work, when these people who had nothing were tromping through the hills and getting shot at." Within two months, Radio Mutiny was on the air. Members of the collective adopted their noms de air in part to make things tougher for law enforcement, and in part to have a little fun.

The station's programming included *Incarceration Nation*, hosted by an ex-con who talked about prison issues and played a lot of Johnny Cash songs. *Africa Report* provided an overview of news to West Philly's burgeoning community of African immigrants. Radio Mutiny ran well enough until the sixth and final FCC bust. They weren't alone: In Florida, a SWAT team raided the home of progressive pirate Doug Brewer and his wife, while another Florida bust took right-wing antigovernment activist Arthur "Lonnie" Kobres off the air. Dunifer's Free Radio Berkeley fell silent when the federal district court reversed itself.

Tridish says the Radio Mutiny crew opted for full-frontal confrontation with the authorities. Tridish says he called reporters and left messages: "Hello, I'm Pete Tridish from the Radio Mutiny collective. The other day the FCC came and threatened to kick down our door unless we let them take away our community radio station. So we dare them to come down, high noon, Monday, in front of Benjamin Franklin's printing press, and we dare the FCC chairman, William Kennard, to put the cuffs on us in public if he thinks community radio is such a bad thing."

Reporters showed up to hear the Mutineers issue a platform for the legalization of low-power community radio. "We said that we were gonna go on tour, and for every station they harassed or shut down, we would teach people to build ten more," Tridish says.

Around the same time, the pirate movement was turning its efforts toward Washington. Congress had unleashed a wave of media consolidation with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and many supporters of broadcast civil disobedience saw licensed low-power broadcasting as an antidote. A Virginia couple submitted a formal proposal to the FCC to license community stations. A few months later, a Florida radio engineer turned activist submitted his own, complete with detailed technical arguments. While the crackdown on pirates continued, the commission took up both proposals.

But the Philadelphia activists stuck to confrontation. They hit the streets of Washington, beamed an unlicensed broadcast at FCC headquarters, then hoisted the Jolly Roger, literally, at the commercial broadcasting trade group the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). "We had someone from Earth First! who was good at that stuff," Tridish says. "We thought, Yes! We win!"

In retrospect, Tridish admits, the stunts didn't help the cause. But a few months later, Tridish took a step inside the Washington process when he accepted an invitation to speak

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on a panel at the Cato Institute. "I didn't know what it was," he says. "I didn't even know places like that existed."

After the event, an FCC employee asked him whether he agreed with Cato's position that the commission should be abolished. Tridish said he probably did. That didn't faze the staffer. "He said, 'You don't have to believe me at this point, but the chairman has looked at a lot of this, and he really wants to go forward with legalizing a low-power radio service. And over the course of the next year we're going to need a lot of engineering evidence to prove this is really gonna work, that there's no interference. We wanna hear how we should do it.' And it became evident to me that the FCC one way or another was going to create a low-power radio service, and it was really only a question of whether we planned to participate in it or not."

Prometheus abandoned confrontation in favor of collaboration. Tridish boned up on technical issues, submitted proposals and learned that the FCC wasn't the "corporate lapdog" he'd assumed. "There are a lot of people who go to work there feeling they want to do something good for the public," he says. "I've come to have more sympathy for them, because they try to set up rules that they can apply universally and fairly. Thinking that I was gonna bike-lock my neck to my transmitter so that they couldn't shut me down wasn't the right response when the FCC shifted its position in favor of LPFM."

Hannah Sassaman says advocates for the expansion of low-power FM are 'going to need' fundamentalists to win Congressional support.

Early in 2000 the FCC approved a plan for licensing hundreds of LPFM stations. Almost immediately, commercial broadcasters acting through the NAB, and public broadcasters acting through National Public Radio, argued that the FM dial was already too crowded and that the new stations would only cause interference.

In the United States FM stations are licensed to transmit on "channels" that sit two-tenths of a megahertz apart, for example at 91.5, 91.7, 91.9 and so on. The early proposals for LPFM asked the FCC to open up licenses on frequencies with only a single channel of buffer space to minimize interference. So, for example, if a particular city already had licensed stations on 91.5 and 92.7, two LPFMs could come onto the air, at 91.9 and 92.3. The FCC increased that buffer to two channels, so in the example above, only one LPFM could take to the air, at 92.1.

Even so, the NAB and NPR complained that the FCC's proposed spacing was too tight and fought to change it. The NAB didn't return calls seeking comment, but NPR president Kevin Klose says public broadcasters did what they had to in order to protect their interests. "In any one of these situations where you have a disagreement between a federal entity and another group, like us and our member stations, you have three options to work it out," Klose says. "One is administrative, one is legislative and one is judicial. We tried administrative through the FCC. It didn't work. There were people in Congress who were interested in this thing. So that seemed to us to be an appropriate place to turn."

LPFM advocates say the resulting legislation—passed in late 2000 as a rider to an appropriations bill—was unprecedented: It overrode the FCC technocrats, whose tests showed minimal interference with a two-channel buffer. The law increased the buffer to three channels, so our hypothetical city wouldn't have been eligible for a new license at all. The law meant that the nation's top ten markets, whose FM bands are most crowded, lost the some two dozen stations they'd have received under the FCC proposal. The largest city to get a license was Spokane (metro population about 420,000). LPFM was born as a mostly rural service.

Klose says that aside from the interference issues, public broadcasters like the idea of more noncommercial radio stations. But LPFM activists say public broadcasters have been hostile to community broadcasting for decades. In the late 1960s the newly created Corporation for Public Broadcasting pushed to eliminate hundreds of Class D low-power FM stations that were already on the air. "CPB didn't want to support little 10-watt stations or student stations, because that would dilute what little resources they had," says Bill Siemering, who at the time was writing NPR's mission statement and laying the groundwork for *Fresh Air* and *All Things Considered*. Some of the small stations professionalized, but most went dark. Siemering says public radio was supposed to make up for the loss, but hasn't. "You have programs that'll bring in the most dollars from listeners, and most of those are the major network programs rather than local ones," he says. "This is something public radio should be debating."

The NPR- and NAB-backed law that restricted the FCC's original plan for LPFM mandated a technical study on interference between closely spaced stations. The FCC assigned the study to the MITRE Corporation, a Massachusetts nonprofit that advises the Defense Department, FAA and IRS, among others, on technical issues. Two years ago MITRE confirmed the FCC's original tests and recommended a two-channel buffer between stations. Klose says NPR has "questions" about the study, but the results energized LPFM advocates on the right and left alike, pushing the preachers and the pirates into coalition.

Since then, they've been lobbying for legislation, like McCain's bill, that would reinstate the FCC's original proposal. In January Sassaman went to an LPFM Success Seminar organized by the Christian Community Broadcasters. "Prometheus cleans up nice, but we're not politically able to get senators like Sam Brownback or Trent Lott or even Kay Bailey Hutchison to talk to us as openly or as communally as we'd like," she says. Prometheus is trying to organize the fundamentalists. "In order to be able to expand low-power FM on the Hill, we're going to need these people."

Prometheus got its first exposure to those strange bedfellows in 2003, when left and right lined up to attack FCC plans to loosen media ownership restrictions. Tridish and cultural conservative Brent Bozell found themselves aligned in arguing against allowing media conglomerates to grow. When the FCC went ahead with the plan anyway, a group of media reform lawyers chose Prometheus as lead plaintiff in a federal lawsuit to overturn it. Conservatives submitted amicus briefs. Prometheus prevailed, and the courts overturned the FCC proposal.

Last year Prometheus got inside information from a Georgia-based evangelist who talked up LPFM during conference calls between the religious broadcasters and the White House.

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Although McCain's bill died in committee last year, he reintroduced it this year on the very morning that the low-power broadcasters met at the FCC. But the coalition of LPFM supporters didn't convince any Republicans to co-sponsor the measure. Nonetheless, supporters of the reintroduced bill remain optimistic, in part because of the galvanizing effect of Prometheus's involvement. "They understand the complexities and difficulties of the policy process, but they face the challenge with hope and with optimism," says Washington lobbyist Michael Bracy, policy coordinator for the Future of Music Coalition, an activist group. "And they're tireless. They've transformed themselves from gadflies to effective advocates, and that's inspiring." ■

HOW A PROSPECTIVE BIOCHEMIST BECAME A MUCKRAKER AND CHAMPION OF MEDIA REFORM.

Amy Goodman's 'Empire'

LIZZY RATNER

Amy Goodman didn't know if anyone was listening.

It was the morning of September 11, 2001, and the host of the muckraking radio news program *Democracy Now!* was broadcasting from her studio in a converted firehouse just blocks from the World Trade Center. She was hunched over her microphone, intent on painting an audio portrait of the "horrific scene of explosions and fires," but the truth was she didn't know if anyone could hear her. The phone lines were dead or temporarily blocked, and she had already overshot her slated hourlong broadcast time. More serious, she had recently been banished from her professional home at Pacifica Radio after a hostile internal shake-up, and she was only being aired by twenty or so affiliate stations.

STEPHEN KLING

Still, as the neighboring businesses evacuated into the streets, Goodman decided to go on talking. She kept the lines open and the microphones hot, throwing her voice into the radio murk in case any stations chose to pick up the feed. "We are not going to draw any conclusions at this point, just reporting the information of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center buildings, the plane crashing into the Pentagon, a fire at the Pentagon right now," Goodman said in her grainy alto, at the beginning of what would become an eight-hour marathon broadcast that was eventually picked up by KPFA, the one Pacifica station still airing her broadcasts. And then, shortly after 10 AM, she announced: "It looks like the south tower of the World Trade Center has collapsed..."

Three and a half years and two wars later, Goodman is still talking into her microphone, reporting on the big and small crises of the day. She is still broadcasting from the firehouse studio, still sending her war-and-peace reports into the media ether, except that these days when the engineer flips the switch on her microphone, she can expect hundreds of thousands of listeners to tune in.

In the years since 9/11, *Democracy Now!* has shape-shifted from a popular niche program broadcast on some twenty-five independent stations to a multimedia institution beamed each day to some 330 community radio and television stations (it has also returned to Pacifica). The skeletal four-person crew has ballooned to twenty-seven full- and part-time staff, including seven radio and TV producers, two outreach organizers and, yes, a professional archivist. And the drafty garret studio has been abandoned for a larger space on the first floor of the firehouse, which will soon be abandoned for yet another, larger firehouse studio. On any given day, the *Democracy Now!* website logs a solid 50,000 visits. "It's the lifeline for a lot of people," says professor and media critic Robert McChesney. "I think it's probably the most significant progressive news institution that has come around in some time."

The story of how *Democracy Now!* transformed itself from a scrappy daily radio program into an independent media empire (OK, maybe not an empire, maybe more of an emerging nation) is in some ways the larger story of progressive media during the Bush years: Extremist President concocts bogus war, quashes dissent, then "embeds" the mainstream media, creating a news crisis that sends the information-starved citizenry fleeing to the indie frontiers for sustenance. But in many ways the story of *Democracy Now!* is its own twisty narrative, which progressives will be analyzing, emulating and debating as they attempt to build a robust alternative media landscape.

Goodman herself lays the credit—or blame—for the program's success squarely at the well-rested feet of the mainstream newsmakers, who, she says, leave "a huge niche" for *Democracy Now!* "They just mine this small circle of blowhards who know so little about so much. And yet it's just the basic tenets of good journalism that instead of this small circle of pundits, you talk to people who live at the target end of the policy," she says as she sips double espresso in a favorite Chinatown coffee shop. Dressed in her customary black vest and cargo pants, her wispy gray-brown hair hanging to her shoulders, she looks like a journalist in combat mode, as if she's just come off the war beat in Baghdad. "I think the Bush Administration not finding weapons of mass destruction laid bare more than the Bush Administration," she adds. "It laid bare media that act as a conveyor belt for the lies of the Administration. You know governments are going to lie, but not the media. So I think people started to seek out other forms of information."

Lizzy Ratner, a reporter for the New York Observer, *worked at* Democracy Now! *from September 2001 to July 2002.*

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Goodman has a point. But the story of *Democracy Now!* goes beyond the traditional voice-in-the-wilderness thesis. That's certainly part of it, but it's also a story about the unsung slog and labor of "doing" independent media: about organizing and movement-building and an unusual cross-media collaboration that *Democracy Now!* launched shortly after 9/11.

And, of course, it is a story about Goodman, who, at 48, has come to be seen by many on the left as a kind of human megaphone for the collective progressive unconscious. To these supporters, the slight and intense Goodman—whose shows range from on-the-ground testimonials by Iraq War victims to debates on Social Security between Paul Krugman and Michael Tanner—is one of the lone disciples of a fiercely independent, muckraking brand of journalism practiced by I.F. Stone and George Seldes, Upton Sinclair and Seymour Hersh. "What Amy's doing is trying to re-create a democratic society where you have varied, independent perspectives on the world," says MIT professor and political activist Noam Chomsky.

But Goodman also has her critics—people who have clashed with her strongly held opinions or had the misfortune of being on the opposing side of a debate. Others find her brand of journalism too "ideological," too "reflexively left." "Before she went to *Democracy Now!* she did some very good pieces for NPR," says John Dinges, a former editorial director of National Public Radio and a professor at Columbia Journalism School. "But at some point she became more of an advocate than we were comfortable with."

While some critics see Goodman's approach as advocacy, she would call it just a matter of 'going where the silence is.'

The reality, of course, is that Goodman's brand of reporting is unflaggingly political. She covers a hurricane in Florida the same way she covers an election in Iraq, which is to say, with an eye to unearthing the forgotten victims or hidden handshake behind the story. And, as she herself has said, "I don't really think of it as, There's politics and then there's your life." But while some critics see this approach as advocacy, Goodman would call it just a matter of "going where the silence is."

"That is the responsibility of a journalist: giving a voice to those who have been forgotten, forsaken, and beaten down by the powerful," she wrote in *The Exception to the Rulers*, the book she co-authored with her younger brother, David Goodman, published last year. "It is the best reason I know to carry our pens, cameras, and microphones into our communities and into the world."

This strain of journalism is not for the weak-willed or faint of heart, and Goodman, perhaps not surprisingly, is neither. After twenty years in the progressive trenches, she is one of those quirky combinations of tough and compassionate, fearless and sensitive, headstrong and kindhearted. When confronting her opponents, for instance, Goodman can be relentless, even withering, but her friends sing paeans to her compassion and loyalty. In the same spirit, she doesn't flinch at the idea of flying off to a war zone, but the prospect of breaking that news to her mother makes her pulse race.

Daily News columnist Juan Gonzalez, a colleague of Goodman's, sums up this paradox with his own idiosyncratic anecdote. "Amy's not the easiest person to work with; number one, she never sleeps. She's essentially always working and basically tires everybody out who tries to keep up with her," says Gonzalez, who is also a part-time co-host of *Democracy Now!* "But Amy can also be very thoughtful to her staff. She's always bringing in cupcakes for birthdays or taking photos to, you know, preserve the moment." He chuckles. "Whenever she's at my place, she spends more time with my daughter than with the adults."

On a blustery afternoon in early March, Goodman sits huddled in the tin-can compartment of a Long Island Rail Road train, en route to Long Beach to visit her 108-year-old grandmother. The idea is to have a chance to talk away from the whir and distraction of the studio, but even as the train barrels through tunnels and low-reception zones, Goodman's cell phone keeps buzzing with updates from her producers. "It's going to be a very interesting show tomorrow," she says, brown eyes twinkling, after a debriefing on one segment: a debate on the Democratic Party's decision to recruit antichoice candidates to run for Senate.

As Goodman is quick to point out, she is not herself a big fan of being on the other side of the microphone, at least when the subject is her own life. She is strenuously private, and personal questions tend to elicit a polite, pained expression: a subtle tightening of the muscles around her lips and eyes. But she does enjoy telling a good story, of which she's collected quite a few over the years. And so, as the train rumbles past the bulky two-family homes of Queens and Long Island, she slowly begins unraveling the strands of her career, beginning with her accidental discovery of Pacifica Radio.

It was 1984, and Goodman had just graduated from Harvard with a degree in anthropology. She was living with her parents on Long Island, contemplating graduate school in biochemistry, when she happened to station-surf across WBAI. "I was just completely shocked by this place I stumbled on," she recalls. "It was just raw. It was all the beauty and horror that is New York in all of its myriad accents. And I said, What is this place?"

Not long after, Goodman landed an apprenticeship at the station. She started out making documentaries, then moved to covering local news stories, and two years later she was running the WBAI newsroom. "For the first couple of years, Amy was the person I learned everything from," says independent radio producer David Isay, who got his start in 1987 when Goodman encouraged him to produce his first radio piece and who went on to win a MacArthur "genius" award. "She was fired up. We would stay up all night working on stories. She was basically exactly the same as she is now."

Goodman grew up in the cozy middle-class suburb of Bay Shore in a tight-knit, progressive-intellectual family. Her father was an ophthalmologist who helped found the Long Island chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility; her mother was a social worker and teacher of women's literature and history who also founded the local SANE/FREEZE group. "I think [my politics] come originally from my parents' concern about social justice," says Goodman, "and I think also from learning about the Holocaust as I was growing up, with so many family members

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who died. I took to heart that slogan, 'never again,' for *everyone*."

While Goodman says she's "generally a shy person," she's made her career, at least in part, on hand-to-hand verbal combat, throwing rhetorical left hooks at everyone from former Democratic Senator Bob Kerrey to Newt Gingrich, of whom she demanded in 1994: "Why haven't you apologized to American women for calling [the First Lady] a bitch?" Her most notorious run-in, however, was with President Clinton, who called in to WBAI on Election Day 2000 as part of a get-out-the-vote push for Al Gore and Hillary Clinton. The President had no doubt been expecting the usual brief and chatty star treatment, but instead he got a thirty-minute grilling about NAFTA, the death penalty and sanctions against Iraq, among other topics. "Now let me...now, wait a minute," he finally spluttered. "You started this, and every question you've asked has been hostile and combative..."

Responded Goodman, "They've been critical questions."

For *Democracy Now!* fans, this episode ranks among the all-time greats, the indie-news equivalent of the *M*A*S*H* finale. But for Goodman the most "pivotal" story of her career was the story of East Timor, the small island nation north of Australia that was invaded by the Indonesian military in 1975—with an approving nod from Washington. Few reporters cared, or dared, to go there, but in 1990 Goodman headed over with fellow journalist Allan Nairn because, she said, journalists should cover what it means to be "at the target end" of US foreign policy.

In November 1991, during a second trip, she and Nairn were nearly killed in a massacre of at least 271 Timorese. It was, Goodman said, the most horrifying moment of her life. "To be there as these soldiers opened fire on innocent people and gunned them down, and ultimately understanding there was nothing we could do to stop it, that it was only getting word out that could make a difference..." she says, trailing off.

For Goodman, the Santa Cruz Massacre, as it came to be known, became the signal example of "going where the silence is," and in many ways the past thirteen years of her career can be tied to that moment, when the abstract horror of war became real for her. When she returned home, Goodman linked up with Timorese activists and their allies, and began telling the story to both mainstream and independent media. Some critics took issue with this activist style of journalism, but it won her praise in other quarters. What happened in East Timor "probably comes as close to genocide as anything in the late twentieth century...but it was impossible to get anyone to hear about it," says Chomsky. "Amy brought it to public attention."

In early February 1996 *Democracy Now!* went live for the first time over the airwaves of Pacifica, the country's largest progressive radio network. But a more significant marker for the purposes of this story might be early September 2001, when *Democracy Now!* made its first leap beyond radio into the multimedia world of television and beyond.

It was a few days before 9/11, and Goodman had just been forced from the studios of WBAI, the local Pacifica station, during what is commonly known as "the Pacifica crisis"—a period of several months of fierce debates over the mission and management of the network. In the scramble to keep broadcasting on affiliate stations, she had landed at the firehouse, a small limestone castle of a building owned and operated by

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Downtown Community Television. The independent media collective also rented space to Manhattan Neighborhood Network, a cable access channel, and in early September a MNN producer had the notion of switching on the TV cameras and videotaping Goodman's radio broadcast. The idea was to air the show on MNN once or twice week.

Then came 9/11: All of a sudden *Democracy Now!* was the closest national broadcast to Ground Zero. "About two days after September 11, I was sleeping at the firehouse and Anthony Riddle, then the head of MNN, called," recalls Goodman. "'We'll go live with the show today,' he said. 'The camera will go on; we'll flick the switch.' And then it just started."

The news that *Democracy Now!* was going live on TV and needed volunteers traveled quickly through New York's lefty grapevine, and before long a group of refugees from the topsy-turvy post-9/11 world began appearing at the bright red doors of the firehouse. I was one of those refugees, a stray who showed up during the confusion of mid-September and ended up staying for nearly a year. It didn't seem to matter that I had no radio or television experience (heck, I didn't even own a TV); such was the nature of the times—or the desperation—that on my first day in the studio I was plunked behind one of the cameras and told to shoot. Eventually I began helping produce the program.

'What Democracy Now! *understood was this need for a multi-platform strategy.'*
—Dan Coughlin, Pacifica executive director

Those early weeks of *Democracy Now!* TV were a surreal, and occasionally comical, brew of trial, error and improvisation, served up daily against the backdrop of the steroidal news cycle (War! Anthrax! Patriot Act!). While the radio portion of the show remained strong—Goodman was adamant about that—the television component was very much a spit-and-glue kind of operation. The set, for instance, was little more than a black table backed by a wall of newspaper clippings meant to convey "serious news program" while also reducing the glare from the lights. The show's billboard, which was intended to identify the program for the audience, was written in masking tape against the control room window. And when a guest couldn't come in to the studio but had to call in to the program, as was often the case (this was still primarily a radio show), the crew simply trained its cameras on the telephone—for five minutes at a time. "It looked like a televised radio show," says Goodman, with a good deal of generosity.

Still, for all the kinks and knots, *Democracy Now!*'s early TV adventures hinted at a larger possibility: a collaborative, independent news program that used all the available public forms of media distribution to break through the static of the mainstream noise machine. "What *Democracy Now!* understood was this need for a multi-platform strategy—and by that I mean distributing your program on television, cable, analogue radio, satellite radio, Internet, MP3s, etc.," says Dan Coughlin, executive director of Pacifica and Goodman's first *Democracy Now!* producer. "At a time when the old media are dying, this is something that most independent progressive media are going to have to move toward."

For *Democracy Now!* this strategy has consisted largely of building alliances, knitting a motley jumble of independent broadcasters and public-access stations into a smooth, cross-media collaboration. The first of these alliances—with the progressive cable network Free Speech TV and the public-access collective Deep Dish TV—grew quite naturally out of previous projects; both organizations had worked with *Democracy Now!* to produce a daily telecast during the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 2000, and both had been looking to air a daily news program ever since. When Goodman reached out to them in September 2001, they readily agreed to distribute the show.

But *Democracy Now!* has also done its share of wooing stations, and it's done this in a rather unconventional way: by hiring organizers who work with local activists to lobby their public broadcasters to air *Democracy Now!* This tactic reflects perhaps as much about *Democracy Now!*'s movement-style credo as it does about the rocky public-access terrain, but it also seems to be savvy strategy. Since hiring its first organizer two years ago, *Democracy Now!* has recruited more than 200 radio and television stations.

Still, despite the focus on cultivating new stations, *Democracy Now!*'s most significant relationship remains that with Pacifica—though this, too, has changed over the years. In January 2002, following the court-ordered settlement of the Pacifica crisis, *Democracy Now!* returned to its old slot in the network's schedule. Then in June 2002 Goodman reached an agreement with Pacifica to turn *Democracy Now!* into a separate nonprofit organization that would continue to broadcast on the network but would also be free to build up its TV program. The deal generated some grumbling at the time from those who felt that *Democracy Now!* was abandoning Pacifica, but Goodman and Coughlin maintain that the move has been "tremendously successful" for both the network and the program: Pacifica continues to provide the show with $500,000 in operating support, while *Democracy Now!* continues to raise some $2 million for the network through quarterly fund drives. (*Democracy Now!* raises the rest of its $1.8 million budget through contributions from its TV broadcasters, Link TV and Free Speech TV, as well as through foundation grants, individual donations and sales from its online store. It does not accept commercial or corporate sponsorship.)

Meanwhile, as all this was unfolding, the television program was making its slow journey out of the technical Stone Age into modernity. In January 2002 Goodman hired a director to begin whipping the program into visual shape, and eventually she added three TV producers. The resulting changes have been gradual but unmistakable, as five-minute phone shots have given way to in-studio guests, Reuters video feeds and, yes, a TelePrompTer. "It's been a process, because I'm all about the packaging, and they are all about the content," says the program's director, Uri Gal-Ed. "From the beginning there were elements in place, but we basically created a TV show from scratch."

Shortly before 9 o'clock on the soggy evening of March 28, Amy Goodman strides onstage at the New York Society for Ethical Culture in Manhattan amid an explosion of whoops and applause. She is the last in a line of speakers for an event billed as both a fundraiser for WBAI and the launch of the paperback leg of her book tour, and Goodman has sold out the several-hundred-seat house.

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"AAAMY!" hollers a fan from the nosebleed seats.

Goodman's indie-media star status had been building since well before 9/11, but it's begun to approach critical velocity during the past year, as she's traveled the country to promote *Exception to the Rulers*. Goodman has dubbed this second leg "Un-Embed: the Media Tour," but in many ways it has been less of a book tour than a "free the media" organizing drive. Each event has been an occasion for Goodman to exhort her audience to "be the media," as well as to raise money for community broadcasters. To date the events have raised more than $1 million.

To skeptics, this tour is perhaps little more than the standard self-promoting book junket—fronted by an author who happens to have the stamina of the Grateful Dead. But in many ways this effort—particularly Goodman's call to "take back the public airwaves"—is what has set *Democracy Now!* apart from its sibling media outlets, giving it the texture of a movement as well as a radio and television show. Because what *Democracy Now!* has recognized, perhaps better than most progressive news outlets, is that without the strength of a grassroots movement it's tricky—perhaps impossible—to create a robust, independent media; and without an independent media there is little chance for free, unfettered reporting. And, of course, without unfettered reporting, well, there's not much hope for democracy.

"I see the media as a huge kitchen table that stretches across this country, that we all sit around and debate and discuss the most important issues of the day: life and death, war and peace," Goodman says, winding toward the end of her speech at the Ethical Culture Society. "Anything less than that is a disservice to a democratic society.

"Democracy now!" she adds, punching the air lightly with her fist. And then, with a sudden, self-conscious smile, she steps back from the microphone. ■

CHASTENED BY VOTER RESPONSE TO THEIR EARLIER ERRORS, MANY LEGISLATORS PUSH REFORM.

Congress Tunes In

ROBERT W. McCHESNEY, JOHN NICHOLS AND BEN SCOTT

Back in the mid-1990s, radio policy debates in Washington generated so little interest that many members of Congress were surprised to learn that they had voted—in the Telecommunications Act of 1996's grab-bag of giveaways to corporations—to completely rewrite the rules regarding the ownership, character and content of what ought to be this country's most democratic medium of mass communications, radio.

STEPHEN KLING

But as the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first, the dimensions of the disaster created by years of bad policy-making became clear to everyone who was listening. Musicians stopped hearing their songs on the air, as disc jockeys were replaced by robots. Citizens stopped hearing local news, as thousands of broadcast journalists were replaced by syndicated right-wing ranters from New York and Los Angeles. What diversity there had been on the airwaves rapidly disappeared, as Clear Channel Communications bought up more than 1,200 radio stations nationwide—while its competitors gobbled up most of the rest—and American ears were assaulted by the heavily formatted, intellectually insipid and ideologically narrow sound of radio produced under a regimen of concentrated media ownership.

Needless to say, Americans hated what they were hearing, and millions of them came to recognize the connection between consolidation and the decline of radio as a useful—to say nothing of enlightening—medium. No small amount of the successful opposition to the Bush Administration's move in 2003 to relax media ownership rules was stimulated by widespread outrage over what loosened media ownership rules had done to radio. In polls taken after the 2004 election, MoveOn.org and True Majority both asked members what issue progressives should focus on this year; in each survey, media reform ranked second, behind only the integrity of the electoral system, and ahead of the Iraq War, healthcare reform and environmental protection. "People are very concerned about the media, about media policy, and what's happened to radio since 1996 has an awful lot to do with that concern," says Democratic Senator Russ Feingold, who has introduced legislation to address the impact of the Telecommunications Act. "Radio is such an important part of people's lives, and they see it changing in ways that trouble them. So they are starting to ask questions, and to demand answers."

Even as media reformers and a growing caucus of allies in Congress seek to repair the damage done to traditional radio by consolidation, many performers and listeners are tuning in to alternatives. Some of the country's most talented and controversial on-air personalities, including Martha Stewart and Howard Stern, have signed on to the relatively new Sirius or XM satellite radio networks. Those two networks are booming—XM added 540,000 subscribers in the first three months of 2005 despite the fact that subscribers must pay monthly fees just to tune in. Their success is putting pressure on Clear Channel and Infinity, the companies that own so much of commercial radio, to loosen up tight music playlists and begin innovating again. But so far there is little evidence that the conglomerates are going to restore the local news and commentary that was lost in the rush to cut expenses in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It costs money to produce local

Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols are co-founders of Free Press, the national media reform network, and Ben Scott is the director of the organization's Washington office.

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radio that's actually local, and the pressure from satellite radio tends mostly to be on the entertainment side of the ledger.

Podcasting, which makes audio files available online in a form that allows software to automatically detect new files and download them, may actually pose more of a threat to traditional radio. Podcasters can, at very little cost, produce local news and public-affairs programs, as well as music and cultural programming, and distribute it in a form that is at once instantly available and permanently accessible. Howard Dean's former backers, the tech-savviest of the 2004 election's activists, have been in the forefront of producing and distributing podcasts at sites like www.howarddeanwasright.com. It won't be long until podcasts can be easily downloaded directly to cell phones and automobiles. It is in this new technology territory that some of the fiercest lobbying of the federal government is taking place. The big broadcasters aren't at all enthusiastic about facing competition from thousands of new grassroots radio programmers, especially if the newcomers offer a genuine alternative to the drab content on stations the big broadcasters have spent millions to purchase.

Even on the frontiers of new media, the lobbying edge of

Anyone Listening?

A freight train barreling through Minot, North Dakota, on a frigid night in 2002 went off the tracks, causing freight cars to scatter along the rails like a loose pack of cards. Five tank cars carrying anhydrous ammonia ruptured, filling the area with a poisonous gas cloud. But a public warning over radio wasn't broadcast for nearly ninety minutes. One person died, and more than 300 were injured in the incident.

Little more than two blocks away from the derailment, Jennifer Johnson heard the crash, then watched the ammonia cloud roll toward her house. She searched in vain for information on what had happened. "The phone line was out, so I couldn't call 911," she told the *Bismarck Tribune*. "The only thing on the radio was music—no one was telling us what happened or what to do." She dialed through every station in town, but after an hour without hearing an announcement, she gave up and turned the radio off. "We didn't know what the chemical would do to us," she says.

What happened in Minot reflects a nationwide problem: Media consolidation has left many radio stations nearly empty at night. At the time of the accident, Clear Channel owned six of Minot's eight stations, including the designated emergency announcement station, but only one person was there during the accident and did not respond to local authorities' calls because phone lines were jammed by residents calling in. The authorities tried activating the radio's Emergency Alert System to notify the public about what to do, which can be done without station personnel, but the EAS failed. Authorities had to pull out a phonebook and call local Clear Channel employees at their homes to tell them to broadcast an emergency message.

The stations were understaffed because of voice-tracking, a technology that allows the airing of preprogrammed playlists, eliminating the need for someone to be in the DJ booth. Relatively unknown in the early 1990s, voice-tracking became widely used after the Telecommunications Act of 1996 lifted restrictions on the number of stations one company may own. Voice-tracking enabled Clear Channel to cut employees across the country; as much as 70 percent of its programming is now voice-tracked, according to the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Other companies had to follow suit to compete. Numerous complaints about problems produced by voice-tracking, which include more than safety issues, have been filed with the Federal Communications Commission, prompting it to ask the public and media stakeholders last year for their comments on whether voice-tracking negatively affects local broadcasters and listeners. Comments were due in early January. But the FCC put the inquiry on hold because, according to a commission spokesperson, its chairmanship is in transition.

Clear Channel management and local authorities are at odds over who failed in Minot. Clear Channel's Rick Stensby says local police didn't have their EAS set up correctly, while Lieut. Fred Debowey, the local 911 coordinator, says Clear Channel and his staff share the blame; he says Clear Channel wasn't using the correct frequency on its receiver, and his own staff weren't aware that their EAS had recently lost power and needed to be reprogrammed. The local authorities also say Clear Channel management has been uncooperative in letting them do enough on-air tests of the EAS to make sure it's working properly. "They don't want us to interrupt their broadcast," Debowey says. "We know that if we cut into a commercial, they'll lose revenue." The FCC requires broadcasters to allow on-air testing only once a month. Debowey's staff does weekly off-air tests of the EAS, which don't break through the radio broadcasts, but they aren't sufficient, Debowey says, noting that an off-air test just a few days before the derailment said the system worked.

What concerns Minot authorities is that the failure could happen again. Little has changed since the derailment. "We're still not able to get ahold of anybody [at Clear Channel] immediately if we need to" late at night, Debowey says. The radio behemoth still owns six of Minot's stations.

Problems pertaining to EAS nationwide, including how many tests are needed, also prompted the FCC to seek comment last year from government agencies on how the system can be made more effective. The FCC is currently reviewing responses.

What happened in Minot isn't an isolated incident. A similar event took place in January in Graniteville, South Carolina, where Clear Channel operates WBBQ, another designated emergency announcement station. After a train derailment caused a chlorine spill that put hundreds of people in danger, the EAS failed on the first attempt. But officials had no way of knowing that, because no one at WBBQ answered their calls.

In 2003 former Clear Channel CEO Lowry Mays told *Fortune* magazine, "We're not in the business of providing news and information.... We're simply in the business of selling our customers products." In other words, the bottom line comes first. Lieutenant Debowey counters, "If you can't keep the public safe, then the bottom line means nothing." ERIC MAGNUSON

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the big media companies remains significant. The FCC has a lot of say regarding the allocation of spectrum—open space on the airwaves. The big traditional broadcasters are currently making the transition from analog TV to digital TV; when they are done, a sizable chunk of the public airwaves will be returned to the government. The Bush Administration wants to auction new licenses to the cell-phone companies. This would close off space on the spectrum that could be used to create public or "unlicensed" access that could clear the way for podcasts to be ubiquitous. Thus, there is a huge high-tech battle to be fought before the FCC, and potentially Congress.

But there are also plenty of battles to be fought about how big media companies use the public airwaves they have already colonized. While television gets the most attention from media critics, radio, with its lower costs and greater ease of distribution, is still the mainstream medium best able to provide access to news and culture. Simple changes in rules regarding the number of stations a single company can own, the right to reply to unfair charges and claims, and the basic responsibilities of broadcasters could dramatically improve the character and quality of American radio. And in Congress, where even conservative Republican members have begun to complain about the disappearance of radio news programming, the opening for promoting these and other changes is real.

Senator John McCain says that behind broadcasters' false claims of interference is fear of the competition from truly local broadcasters.'

Regrettably, much of the attention to media policy currently concerns Congressional efforts to have the FCC levy massive fines against radio and TV broadcasters who engage in "indecent" programming. Some in Congress wish to extend these fines to cable and satellite channels as well, thus making the FCC the über-commissar of electronic media content. Significantly, the most outspoken foes of the fines were those who have been in the forefront of championing real media reform. "We are heading down a slippery slope when Big Brother decides what constitutes free speech and artistic expression," declared Democratic Representative Jan Schakowsky as she explained her opposition to the fines in the debate that preceded House passage of the bill in February. "I worry that increasing fines, especially those directed at individuals, may lead to excessive self-, if not actual, censorship." The solution to vulgar programming, said Democratic Representative Maurice Hinchey, is to put ownership rules in place that make it less rational for firms to produce such fare. It is no coincidence that the greatest purveyors of trash—News Corporation, Viacom and Clear Channel—are also the largest media firms and the firms most dedicated to commercializing every nanosecond of broadcast time.

Fortunately, a progressive agenda for radio policy is being advanced on Capitol Hill, often by bipartisan coalitions. To begin with, low-power FM radio (LPFM)—one of the best vehicles for developing and expanding community radio—is back on the docket. Five years after the commercial broadcasters pressured Congress to scale back the expansion of community radio with bogus allegations of interference, Senator John McCain has put forward a bill—the Local Community Radio Act of 2005—that would increase the number of LPFM station licenses by removing the restrictions on minimum channel separations between broadcasters. When McCain's bill was introduced in February, dozens of LPFM practitioners and advocates packed a forum at the FCC and conducted the biggest lobbying day on Capitol Hill in the history of community radio. And this time, McCain is determined to make sure that industry lies will not define the debate. "It is time for broadcasters to stop hiding behind false claims of interference when they are really afraid of the competition from truly local broadcasters," he says.

McCain also backs another initiative, the Localism in Broadcasting Reform Act of 2005, that would restore far stricter, pre-1996 rules for renewing radio station licenses, require the FCC to conduct a mandatory review of 5 percent of all license renewal applications—as opposed to just rubber-stamping them without comment—and set up a procedure where a challenge to an individual radio station's license would automatically trigger a review of licenses of all stations held by that company. McCain is charged up and ready to fight for the bill, declaring, "It will have a small impact on those stations that are currently meeting their public interest obligations, but it should have a large impact on those citizens whose local broadcaster is not meeting its obligation to serve the local community."

The Broadcasting Reform Act provides a needed vehicle for framing the public interest debate; activists at the local level can ask Senate candidates if they believe that a commercial broadcaster who refuses to cover the local community should lose the right to have a monopoly franchise to the public's airwaves, and if the answer is yes, the activists can demand a pledge to sign on as a co-sponsor of McCain's bill.

In the House, the proposed Fairness and Accountability in Broadcasting Act, sponsored by Democrat Louise Slaughter, would reduce license renewal periods, reinstate the practice of holding public hearings to assess whether broadcasters are meeting public-interest standards, and require that stations cover important news stories with an eye to reflecting a diversity of opinions. At a time when right-wing radio dominates 90 percent of airtime devoted to public affairs, and when the GOP dominates the chamber, Slaughter's legislation will have a hard time getting a hearing. But like McCain's, it provides a tool for organizing, and for challenging Congressional candidates.

Meanwhile, Congress is about to launch a formal review of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the law that loosened media ownership rules for radio, among other things. Senator Daniel Inouye, the ranking Democrat on the commerce committee, which oversees telecommunication and broadcasting regulation, has called for public sessions around the nation to get input on how the law should be updated. At the same time, the FCC, as mandated by the act, will again review its media ownership rules. FCC Democratic members Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, arguably the two most committed backers of the public interest to sit on the committee in decades, have both demanded that the FCC hold hearings across the nation to get public input. Already, the Republican majority on the committee—which, with the departure of controversial chair Michael

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Powell, will now be led by Bush Administration ally Kevin Martin—is quietly moving to limit debate. Copps and Adelstein will probably be forced to hold informal public hearings on their own. It is important to remember, however, that informal hearings held in 2003 played a critical role in galvanizing popular awareness of media ownership issues. Combined with Inouye's "listening sessions," these hearings should keep radio-related issues—particularly demands for a rollback in the number of stations that a single corporation can own and calls for investigations of payola allegations against commercial radio broadcasters—at the center of the debate through next year.

One hopes the heightened attention will help increase Congressional support for National Public Radio, which found a solid niche as the commercial system deteriorated. It's important to bolster public funding for NPR, while at the same time working to see that NPR-affiliated stations are made more accountable to their communities. A central theme in media reform activism has to be protecting and expanding resources for public broadcasting while insuring more popular involvement.

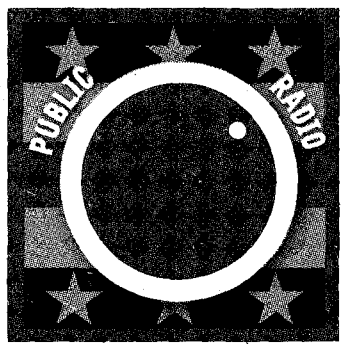
Ultimately, however, the debate about radio cannot focus on a single network, a single format or even a single solution. "The first step toward changing things involves recognizing that radio can be better, that it is supposed to be better," says Representative Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent who has been out front on media issues for years. "When people understand that, and when they realize that because they own the airwaves they have a right to demand that radio be better, that's when we will see all of these concerns begin to be addressed." ■

ONCE A QUIRKY UPSTART, IT IS NOW SOBERLY (SOMETIMES DULLY) MAINSTREAM.

Good, Gray NPR

SCOTT SHERMAN

In January 2002 National Public Radio launched *The Tavis Smiley Show*, a daily one-hour magazine program featuring a high-velocity mixture of commentary, reporting and analysis, and hosted by one of the most energetic and ambitious young media personalities in the country. The first new daily program produced at NPR in a generation, *The Tavis Smiley Show* was directed at an audience poorly served by public radio: African-Americans. According to NPR, it did quite well in terms of ratings. But the honeymoon didn't last: Smiley felt that NPR was not doing enough to promote his program among nonwhite listeners, and his contract negotiations with the network collapsed in late 2004, after which he went on the offensive against NPR. "It is ironic," he informed *Time*, "that a Republican president has an administration that is more inclusive and more diverse than a so-called liberal-media-elite network."



STEPHEN KLING

Smiley directed his firepower at an organization that has accomplished a great deal in recent years. Thanks in part to NPR's comprehensive foreign coverage, its listenership has soared since 9/11: In the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington, NPR gained (and has kept) nearly 4 million new listeners, and the network's various programs now reach 23 million listeners a week on more than 780 member stations. *Morning Edition* is now the most listened-to morning show in the country. As the listenership grew, so did the philanthropic largesse: In November 2003 NPR received a stunning $236 million bequest from the estate of Joan Kroc, the widow of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc.

But Smiley ruined the party both by calling attention to the shortcomings of an institution that emerged from Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and by underlining the gap between NPR's rhetoric—in this case, about racial inclusion—and reality. The entity that calls itself National Public Radio, he reminded us, is not serving the entire public. "You'd be amazed," he told *Salon*, "at the number of people of color who do not know what NPR is."

In its journalism and its financial structure, NPR has indeed evolved into a somewhat different entity from what its founders envisioned. On May 3, 1971, it went on the air with the first broadcast of *All Things Considered*. The program began with a kaleidoscopic account of a major antiwar rally in Washington, DC, at which more than 6,000 people were arrested. "Excuse me," NPR's reporter asked a police sergeant attempting to quell the protests, "Is that a technique? Where the men actually try to drive the motorcycles right into the demonstrators?" Three decades later, rough-edged, in-your-face reportage has largely been supplanted by conventional punditry from the likes of Cokie Roberts, Daniel Schorr and David Brooks, and by consciously mainstream news reporting by correspondents whose voices are often indistinguishable from one another.

To some extent, financial and political pressures help to explain NPR's turn toward mainstream respectability and high-minded professionalism: NPR's founders had every expectation that public funds would cover the budget, but Republican hostility to public broadcasting thwarted those early hopes and dreams. Three decades after its creation, NPR now draws a significant portion of its funding from corporations such as Wal-Mart, Sodexho and Archer Daniels Midland. Likewise, NPR had sound journalistic reasons for turning away from its edgy, countercultural roots. Over the past decade, as media conglomerates dumped public-affairs programming in favor of "infotain-

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ment" and tabloid trash, NPR recognized the void and moved to fill it with high-quality news reporting. That news-oriented model, by drawing in listeners hungry for substantial coverage of politics and public affairs, has enabled NPR to thrive: Today, it continues to add correspondents and bureaus at a time when most other major news organizations are trimming them. A fair-minded evaluation must conclude that if NPR has turned its back on some of the values enshrined in its original mission statement, it has also, in other ways and despite enormous political pressure from its detractors, remained true to them as well.

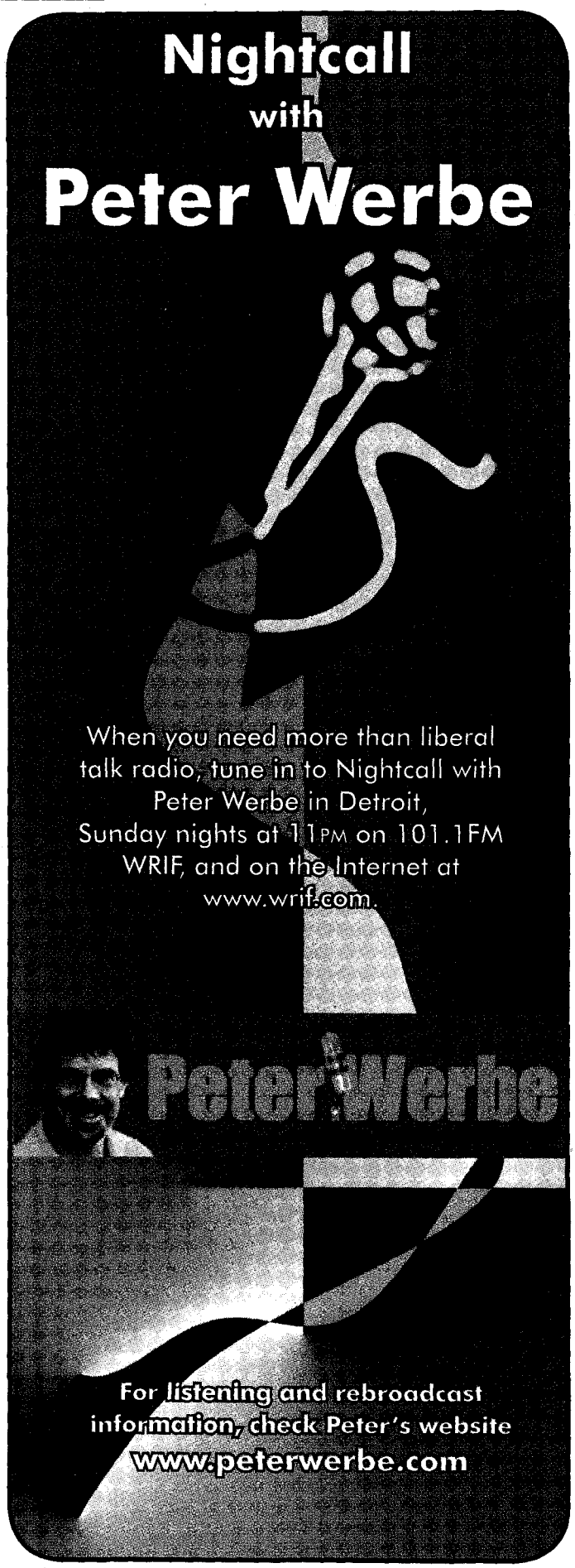
But a price was paid on the road to respectability. With growth and stability has come stodginess, predictability and excessive caution. NPR was founded as an antidote to the mainstream media. Its founders had a unique journalistic and cultural vision that contrasted sharply with the values of establishment publications like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. As NPR began its transformation into a middle-of-the-road, "hard news" entity in the mid-1970s, some of the founders warned that the experiment could end badly, with NPR sounding like an aural equivalent of *The Congressional Record*. That didn't happen, but today's NPR does, at times, seem quite empty and soulless, very much like the eminent daily newspapers its executives venerate.

Some NPR veterans are acutely aware of what has been lost since NPR's birth in 1971. "Over the years, we've become much more *sober*," says Susan Stamberg, who was an early co-host of *All Things Considered*, and who remains a lively and mischievous presence at NPR today. "We've become the good, gray *Times*. They've put color on their front page"—Stamberg pauses for her trademark cackle—"but we're upholding the gray. We're not nearly as quirky as we used to be. And I miss it."

NPR came into existence almost accidentally. The 1967 legislation that gave birth to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was intended solely for public television, but a small group of 1950s-era professionals from the world of educational radio managed to slip the phrase "and radio" into the legislation. In doing so, they displeased the power brokers in the new universe of public broadcasting and contributed to their own exclusion from the new public radio entity, which fell into the hands of a younger generation of educational radio managers, a few of whom had direct ties to the 1960s counterculture.

Chief among them was Bill Siemering, who ran WBFO at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Under Siemering, WBFO provided coverage of the campus antiwar movement and the student strikes that were broken up by the police. But Siemering was interested in the world beyond the university: He set up a storefront studio in Buffalo's ghetto and encouraged local residents to learn the art of radio. He viewed public radio as a grassroots, bottom-up, somewhat anarchistic phenomenon.

It was Siemering who wrote NPR's original mission statement in 1970, which called for "some hard news, but the primary emphasis would be on interpretation, investigative reporting on public affairs, the world of ideas and the arts." NPR's mission statement was not a radical document but a liberal and populist one. And the founders had every desire to serve an alternative audience: "urban areas with sizeable nonwhite audiences," "student groups studying ecology," "groups with distinct lifestyles


Nightcall
with
Peter Werbe
When you need more than liberal talk radio, tune in to Nightcall with Peter Werbe in Detroit, Sunday nights at 11PM on 101.1FM WRIF, and on the Internet at www.wrif.com.
PeterWerbe
For listening and rebroadcast information, check Peter's website
www.peterwerbe.com

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and interests not now served by electronic media." Siemering's document was something of a blueprint for NPR in its first decade, but as the years went by, management lost interest in it. Not long ago, outside archivists requested the document from NPR headquarters, but no copy could be found.

The first broadcast of *All Things Considered* led with the segment about the protest rally, followed by a zesty array of stories: a roundtable discussion with reporters from the *Christian Science Monitor*, which segued into a reading of two antiwar poems from the era of World War I; a dispatch from a barber shop in Iowa whose proprietor was reeling from lost income as more men chose to wear their hair long; a portrait of a nurse turned heroin addict; and, finally, a discussion between Allen Ginsberg and his father, Louis, about the merits and shortcomings of drug abuse.

'NPR does a really rich mix of reporting and coverage of the United States. It's a pretty high standard.' —Martin Turner, BBC

That quirky mix more or less characterized NPR through the mid-1970s, when the arrival of president Frank Mankiewicz laid the groundwork for NPR's transformation into something much closer to a "hard news" organization. Mankiewicz brought financial resources and visibility to NPR, but he also brought conventional journalistic practices—for example, editors. Until 1975 or so, reporters at NPR had worked on their own, with minimal supervision and editorial guidance.

Of the changes ushered in by Mankiewicz, Jack Mitchell, in his new book, *Listener Supported*, writes, "Gone was the notion, so central to the thinking of the first NPR board, of public radio as the people's instrument. The *vox populi* became the voice of the best professionals." Some of those professionals—Nina Totenberg, Cokie Roberts and Linda Wertheimer—had close ties to the Washington establishment. They were the sort of "coolly objective journalists" Siemering and his colleagues had hoped would steer clear of NPR. But Wertheimer & Co. were more or less in control by the time NPR collapsed financially in 1983.

That crisis resulted from financial incompetence and cuts in funding for public broadcasting, which hit public radio especially hard. Rescue came in the form of a substantial loan from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), and from a vigorous fundraising drive by NPR's member stations. (Owing to the decentralized nature of public radio in the United States, the stations have a major say in how NPR does business. NPR itself owns no stations; it merely produces and distributes programming for the member stations. Some, like WNYC in New York and WBEZ in Chicago, produce programming that is regarded by many as often superior to NPR's.) Out of the crisis arose a new NPR—leaner, better managed, more news-oriented, more enamored of audience research and more eager to demonstrate to the world that it was no longer an alternative or countercultural institution.

Indeed, NPR executives had reason to be concerned about the network's image in Washington. Richard Nixon loathed public broadcasting, and nominated the ultraconservative industrialist Joseph Coors to the CPB board. Financially, public radio did well in the Ford and Carter years, but the arrival of Ronald Reagan led, in 1983, to a 20 percent reduction in the federal appropriation for public broadcasting. By the mid-1980s, NPR, still on shaky financial footing, was under pressure from political actors like the Heritage Foundation and *The New Republic*, which published a much-discussed attack on the network in 1986 by Fred Barnes, wherein he claimed that NPR had an inherent bias against conservatives and a reflexive sympathy for left-wing movements in Central America. Writing in *Mother Jones* in 1987, Laurence Zuckerman chronicled a series of newsroom conflicts over US intervention in Grenada and Nicaragua, conflicts that helped to determine the network's overall political direction in the Reagan era. At one point State Department officials complained that an *All Things Considered* segment was too critical of the US-backed *contra* rebels. Then–news director Robert Siegel, according to *Mother Jones*, invited those officials to lunch and concluded that the piece was indeed problematic. Gary Covino, who produced the controversial segment, told *Mother Jones*, "The way [Siegel] handled this story sent the message spoken and unspoken that this was not the kind of stuff NPR should be doing.... Many people picked it up very quickly and began censoring themselves."

NPR's coverage of the 1991 Gulf War marked the network's arrival into the media big leagues. With a million dollars from CPB and the member stations, NPR for the first time sent a team of its own correspondents to cover a war from the field. In the 1990s, as profit-hungry television and radio stations retreated from in-depth reporting on politics and public affairs, NPR endeavored to take over that role. It did so with considerable integrity and professionalism. Awards were racked up; new foreign and domestic bureaus were created. Educated listeners gravitated toward NPR in times of political ferment and, with few options available to them for serious news, stayed for the long haul. By the mid-1990s, NPR was finally in possession of the professional recognition it had long desired. "NPR does a really rich mix of reporting and coverage of the United States," says Martin Turner, who heads the BBC's Washington office. "It's a pretty high standard."

By and large, and with key exceptions, NPR's critics fall into three groups. There is little doubt that NPR is most concerned about the first, and most vocal, group: political conservatives. In 1994 Newt Gingrich and his fellow Republicans put public broadcasting on the chopping block, vowing to "zero it out" of the federal budget. The effort backfired, as viewers and listeners besieged Congress with calls and letters defending public radio and TV. Gingrich & Co. lost the battle to choke off public funds to NPR, but they probably emerged victorious in a larger quest: to anchor NPR in the political center. In a 1995 conversation with University of Maine professor Michael McCauley, who has written an authoritative new book, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio*, Reed Irvine of Accuracy in Media admitted that he felt NPR aired less objectionable material in the 1990s than it did in the 1980s, when AIM first began to assail the network on ideological grounds. These days, Newt Gingrich himself is full of praise for NPR: "Either it is a lot less on the left," he remarked in 2003, "or I have

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mellowed." (NPR itself trumpets the Gingrich turnaround in its press packet as "an amusing fact.")

The second camp of critics consists of people who object to the way in which NPR has ceded political space to the likes of Barnes, Irvine, Gingrich and Pat Buchanan (who once dubbed NPR "an upholstered little playpen of our Chablis-and-brie set"). These critics see NPR as too mainstream, too spineless and timid, too deferential to power. They point to a revolving door between the US government and NPR (president Kevin Klose, for example, was formerly the head of the International Broadcasting Bureau, which oversees Voice of America, Radio Martí and TV Martí); they lament the narrow range of political opinion on NPR (no current NPR commentator, they note, has the progressive credentials of the late Michael Harrington, who had a regular slot on NPR in the 1980s); and they point to NPR's campaign against low-power radio stations [see Rick Karr, page 22].

'The NPR drone' is how some staffers describe the network's overall sound, and many NPR watchers concur with that description.

One does sense a creeping caution and conservatism at NPR over the past decade. In 1994 it engaged death-row inmate (and former WHYY radio reporter) Mumia Abu-Jamal to do a series of brief commentaries on prison life and the death penalty but soon reversed itself in the wake of a vigorous campaign from Senator Bob Dole and Philadelphia's Fraternal Order of Police ("A sterling parable for the new, mature NPR" was James Ledbetter's ironic description of the Abu-Jamal fiasco in his book *Made Possible By...*). In 1995 Andrei Codrescu, one of the few really pungent voices left on NPR, produced a commentary about Armageddon that drew 40,000 complaints from the Christian Coalition. To Codrescu's apparent dismay, NPR rushed to apologize for his segment, after which NPR executives informed *Current*, a trade newspaper, that they would step up their policing of the daily commentaries. In 2000 *TV Guide* and *Current* reported that NPR had allowed three officers from a specialized propaganda unit of the US Army based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to intern at its news programs over a nine-month period. At the time an NPR executive called the decision "a real goof."

Since 9/11 NPR's ombudsman, Jeffrey Dvorkin, has devoted a number of his columns at npr.org to the network's coverage of the Bush Administration and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's perhaps too early for a definitive assessment of NPR's reporting on these subjects, but what's clear is that quite a few listeners are dissatisfied with the coverage of George W. Bush and his foreign policy. Consider a recent missive from Richard Steinman, a research scientist at Columbia University. On the weekend of March 19, 2005, Steinman turned on his radio, looking for coverage of the demonstrations that marked the second anniversary of the Iraq War. In a subsequent letter to Dvorkin, Steinman recounted NPR's programming choices that weekend: "a 'patriotic,' feel-good West Point piece; sports fans' feelings toward a baseball player (yes, steroids); more feel-good filler about an Iraqi-American painter and her use of color; Bantu Refugees Adjust to New Lives in America. Quote from the story: 'we give the government of America the high five'; Army Chefs Battle for Best-Dish Honors; a singing physics professor."

NPR executives bristle at the implication that the programming is frivolous. "It is easy," says vice president of news and information Bruce Drake, "to carve out one small period or point of coverage and use it as a foundation for this kind of criticism—but it wholly ignores the large body of work that NPR has done over the last two years." Drake has a point: Much of NPR's Iraq reportage has indeed been of high quality, and he has the awards (including a Peabody) to prove it.

Yet listeners like Steinman are correct to ask searching questions about NPR and Iraq, especially since some of the network's luminaries have not been shy about expressing their own views on that subject. In October 2002 political correspondent Mara Liasson, in an appearance on *Fox News Sunday*, assailed two Democratic Congressmen for traveling to Iraq. "These guys are a disgrace," she said. "Look, everybody knows it's...Politics 101 that you don't go to an adversary country, an enemy country, and badmouth the United States, its policies and the President of the United States. I mean, these guys ought to, I don't know, resign." In the same vein, *Weekend Edition Saturday* host Scott Simon—who was an antiwar activist at the University of Chicago in the Vietnam era—wrote a swaggering essay for the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page on October 11, 2001, titled "Even Pacifists Must Support This War," and, in a March 2003 speech in Seattle, he reportedly expressed support for the US invasion of Iraq.

A third group of critics takes issue not so much with NPR's political orientation but with its monotonal sound quality; its often bland and homogeneous programming; its lack of aural experimentation; and its diminished cultural coverage—which, they note, was an integral part of NPR's founding mission. These critics, many of whom work in the world of public radio, lament that on the road to becoming a "primary news provider" NPR has neglected its original mission to provide a wide array of top-notch, eclectic cultural programming. (They note, as evidence of NPR's bias against innovative, artistic fare, that the network turned down two of public radio's most popular programs—Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* and Ira Glass's *This American Life*, both of which found a home at rival distributors.)

"The notion that we are turning away from culture is not correct," says Klose, who cites programs like *Performance Today*, *Jazz Profiles* and a recent eight-part series on the state of regional theater as evidence of NPR's cultural vitality. Klose is right: Valuable cultural fare continues to flow from NPR. But the numbers show that news is clearly seen as more important: In 2002 NPR spent $41 million on news and information, and only $7 million on cultural and entertainment programming.

"The NPR drone" is how some staffers describe the network's overall sound, and many NPR watchers concur with that description. "If you listen to a lot of NPR," Brian Montopoli averred in *The Washington Monthly* in 2003, "you realize how similar it all sounds: no matter who is talking, or what they are talking about." Writing in the *New York Times* in 1998, Greil

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Marcus took blistering aim at NPR's leading hosts and newscasters, and wondered why, year after year, their work imparts a sense of "boredom with the world."

Klose takes issue with the notion that NPR is bland, detached and formulaic: "I think it's an urban myth," he says. "It's an armchair cavil that has no basis in fact." But at least one distinguished former NPR employee has a view closer to that of the critics. Two years ago Robert Krulwich, who many consider to be the network's finest correspondent from the late 1970s and early '80s, issued a blunt critique of NPR's programming—and, by implication, its audience—at a staff retreat. According to the notes of a staff member who was present at the talk, Krulwich made the following points:

Critics who wish to see NPR move in a more progressive direction are likely to be disappointed.... NPR's center of gravity is in the center.

> *Politesse*. NPR desires to be polite, to maintain dignity. It doesn't challenge its sources or interviewees. There is room for reporters to stiffen when they hear a lie and poke back.
>
> *Scared of audience*. The habits of your audience shouldn't be your habit. NPR writes too much for our expected listeners. We should disturb the audience occasionally. Tell them what they don't already know and what they don't want to hear.
>
> *No joy*. A mature organization grows accustomed to itself. NPR has lost the willingness to play. You don't hear much that makes you laugh or as many tears. Too much in the mind. NPR needs more people who scream, suffer; people who are playing.

Might the Kroc money, by providing NPR with a solid financial cushion, pave the way for more quirky, spontaneous and risky programming? Says Susan Stamberg: "The Kroc money, actually, will probably reduce the quirk level even more, because with it we can pay for more and more sober reporters out in the field."

One subject on which the critics agree is that NPR can do much more to reach nonwhite listeners. In the 1980s audience research data urged public radio stations to concentrate on a specific type of well-educated, self-motivated individual. According to Jack Mitchell's *Listener Supported*, that data boiled down to the following: "success for public radio meant having great appeal to a subset of the population and none at all to the vast majority of the population." This helps to explain why nine out of ten NPR listeners are white. And these facts form the backdrop to Tavis Smiley's dispute with NPR. (It has to be said that the reasons behind Smiley's divorce from NPR remain murky: On one side is his assertion that NPR wasn't doing enough to promote the show. But NPR, which rushed to create a new black-oriented show hosted by Ed Gordon, claims that Smiley insisted on a $3 million promotional budget for his show, when its entire advertising budget is less than $200,000.)

In any case, some station managers saw Smiley's show as a vital bridge to nonwhite audiences, and they regret its disappearance from NPR's airwaves. One station manager in a major metropolitan market recalls a series of focus groups composed of African-American and Hispanic adults who had never before listened to public radio. He notes that they reacted indifferently to nearly all of the programming on his station—except for Smiley's show, whose energy and verve fully captured their attention.

"There is a belief out there that NPR has no interest in reaching African-Americans and Hispanics," says Maxie Jackson, program director of WETA in Washington, DC. "I don't believe that. I firmly believe that they would love to increase the audience of people of color for public radio programming. That is also true of Public Radio International and the other program suppliers. The problem lies in the fact that none of them have the research, the research budget, the marketing expertise and the communication strategy expertise to do that.... The biggest and fundamental issue at hand here is that none of these organizations have reached out to people of color in the past. None of them know how to do it."

Critics who wish to see NPR move in a more progressive direction are likely to be disappointed. At the moment, NPR's center of gravity is in the middle of the spectrum. Twenty-eight percent of NPR listeners, according to an internal document, consider themselves either "very conservative" or "somewhat conservative." Thirty-two percent defined themselves as "somewhat liberal" or "very liberal." But 29 percent chose the category "middle of the road." Given this data, NPR executives will no doubt play it safe in the years to come.

Indeed, the economic structure of public radio more or less guarantees a centrist editorial formula. Less than 2 percent of NPR's budget consists of funds from the taxpayer-funded CPB. (In the 1970s NPR received 90 percent of its budget from the CPB.) But the member stations, which in some sense "own" NPR, and on which NPR relies for much of its additional revenue, receive a hefty 12.7 percent of their budget from the CPB. To compensate for diminishing federal support, NPR has been forced to rely on corporations and foundations. In 2002, the last year for which data are easily accessible, NPR accepted $250,000 or more from each of the following corporate "underwriters": Procter & Gamble, Sodexho, Microsoft, Saab, Citibank and the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. Wal-Mart became an underwriter in 2004. Both NPR and Wal-Mart refuse to disclose the dollar amount. A public radio system that is substantially dependent on corporations will not, in all likelihood, produce a new generation of I.F. Stones, Jessica Mitfords and Sy Hershes to investigate chicanery in corporate America.

If it is relatively easy to discern NPR's (and public radio's) aversion to political risk-taking, it's somewhat more difficult to explain its resistance to freshening up its programming along the lines suggested by critics who crave innovative, sound-rich fare. NPR staffers interviewed for this article point a finger at NPR management in general and two sober executives in particular: Bruce Drake, the vice president of news and information, and Barbara Rehm, managing editor. Before coming to NPR, Drake worked at the *New York Daily News* for twenty-one years. Rehm is a ten-year veteran of the *Daily News*, after which she spent four years in the early 1990s at Voice of America. Staffers describe them as bureaucrats who possess a narrow political and cultural

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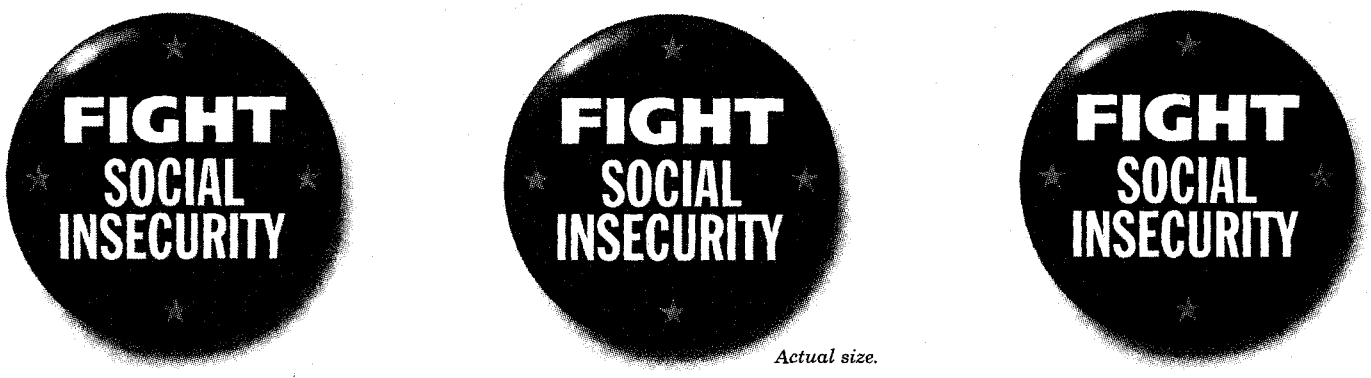

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imagination. For years Drake has opposed the creation of an investigative unit, and NPR is currently without one.

Last May NPR hired, as a second managing editor, the highly regarded editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, Bill Marimow, who was fired from the newspaper after he raised one too many complaints about the Tribune Company's inexorable quest for high quarterly profits at its Baltimore property. Marimow, who won two Pulitzer Prizes for stories about police brutality, has overseen the creation of a number of new beats and staff positions, and he is pushing his reporters to do more investigative reporting and hard-hitting journalism. His main accomplishment so far is an award-winning series by Daniel Zwerdling that documented brutality against immigrants at New Jersey detention facilities. But NPR sources anticipate future discord between Drake and Marimow.

Regardless of what Marimow does, NPR's political reporting will undoubtedly remain relatively bland and cautious. But in a rapidly changing media landscape, it's not at all obvious that a play-it-safe editorial formula will enable NPR to prosper. The average listener is 50 years old and white. Down the road, will younger listeners embrace the polite reporting model that NPR currently adheres to? Possibly. But it's also possible that they will opt for tastier, more opinionated fare on the Internet or satellite radio, especially now that "podcasting," a way of posting audio content online, allows listeners to create their own radio menus.

One way, perhaps, for NPR to confront the challenge is by re-examining the values of its original mission statement, which called for interpretation (in contrast to strict adherence to "hard news" reporting), artistic innovation and gutsy investigative reporting. That approach points toward a journalism that pokes back at lies with outrage and indignation, and programming that is pungent, offbeat and passionate—qualities that NPR's competitors, Public Radio International and American Public Media, have brought to bear with outfits like the American RadioWorks documentary unit, and shows like *Marketplace*, *This American Life*, *To the Point* and *The World* (and as independent producers David Isay and Joe Richman have done on NPR itself).

What might fresher programming sound like? Ombudsman Jeffrey Dvorkin, who is one of NPR's more incisive critics, points to an *All Things Considered* documentary by Noah Adams on the origins of the civil rights song "We Shall Overcome." "As he traced the roots of the song," Dvorkin explains, "and how it so powerfully affected people, the documentary went live to Spelman College in Atlanta, where the school choir performed it straight into *All Things Considered* on Martin Luther King's birthday.... It showed the true power of radio and NPR at its best."

But change won't be easy, according to Bill Buzenberg, who was vice president of news and information at NPR from 1990 to 1997 and is now senior vice president of news at American Public Media. "NPR has a fear of doing kick-ass journalism at the highest level," he says. "They're not hungry enough." ■

LETTERS

CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

San Francisco

■ *Your Call*, on KALW, is a very important isle of enlightenment in the wasteland that is American Media (I threw away my television shortly after 9/11, so you can be sure I am a radio fan). RICHARD WALKER

Pendleton, Ore.

■ Our local hate-and-bait radio station isn't worth spitting on. KGO, San Francisco, is a strong station by day for California, carries at night through all of the West Coast, north and south, Alaska to Mexico at least, and by Internet worldwide. VIC CASE

New York City

■ WBAI (99.5), despite being amateurish and harping on race issues, provides info no other station or network dares. *Democracy Now!* is the best thing on radio. Also Michio Kaku, Doug Henwood, Mimi Rosenberg et al. JOE LASKER

San Diego

■ My all-time favorite is Air America on KLSD-AM (1360) in San Diego. I am regaining my sanity and faith in my fellow Americans. Thank God for progressive talk-radio. I'm rejuvenated daily! And am so grateful! MITCHELL STERLING

La Crosse, Wisc.

■ The Rock (95.7) in La Crosse plays current hard rock and heavy metal, which I love. It also has DJs who are really fun to talk to! NICOLE BAUMGARTNER

Sandy, Ore.

■ *The* most loved station anywhere is WMNF (88.5) in Tampa, Florida. We left years ago but still listen on the Internet. WMNF rafts Tampa's growing progressive community together amid the flood of flaming illiterate bigots. Marathon goals are always exceeded, and 70 percent of pledges return in a week, because it inspires such passionate affection! PETER WYLIE AND CARIN HOUCK-WYLIE

San Francisco

■ My favorite radio station hands-down is KPFA (91.7) out of Berkeley. JUAN PEDRO GAFFNEY

Flagstaff, Ariz.

■ KNAU (88.7), operated by Northern Arizona University, is the only station in all of Arizona north of Phoenix that has classical music—the only one I ever listen to, consequently. H. DAVID HAMMOND

Westfield, NY

■ I have been a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; www.cbc.ca) listener, exclusively, for the past twenty-five years. It kept me sane and well informed through the 1980s—the years of the "Smiling Illusionist." *As It Happens*, *Ideas*, *The World at Six* and so many other programs—listen and you can feel your IQ rise! DAVID HAWKER

Rensselaerville, NY

■ WRPI, the student and volunteer-run station operating under the auspices of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, has the courage to broadcast *Democracy Now!* Area broadcasters, nonstudent, nonprofessional but with a decided interest in social justice and civil rights, also avail themselves of the opportunity to disseminate crucial information and ideas through the cooperation of both the station and the college. Although we do have a local affiliate of NPR in this area—WAMC—with considerable broadcasting wattage and finances, and this station does air *Alternative Radio* once a week, by and large its programming lacks the provocative edge that makes WRPI valuable as an alternative to what the mainstream media is today. BARBARA DEMILLE

New York City

■ Advanced age and limited mobility have their compensations. I can listen to WNYC-AM in New York City from 6 AM to 6 PM. A wide range of topics is explored in depth by remarkably well-prepared interviewers who ask challenging questions but are never rude. An added attraction is spontaneous, relevant, sophisticated humor. BEATRICE G. ROSENBAUM

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Avenging Angel

MARTIN DUBERMAN

JOHN BROWN, ABOLITIONIST: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights.
By David S. Reynolds.
Knopf. 578 pp. $35.

Who, if anyone, has the "right" to kill? And from what source does the right derive? When does (or should) taking another life bring honor, and when disgrace? Is there such a thing as a "just" war that merits medals and heroes—the American Revolution? The fight against fascism?—or is slaughter always slaughter, and never worthy of praise? Do certain circumstances mitigate the crime of murder? Is "self-defense" the chief of these? On what grounds would one deny the right of Jews earmarked for Nazi extermination to resist violently? Or the right of black slaves, their lives stolen, their bodies brutalized, to slit the throats of their self-designated masters? Does the same exculpation extend to revolutionaries (American? Algerian? Cuban?) who take up arms to topple tyrannical laws and rulers? To a woman fighting off a rapist? A gay person being fag-bashed? A sex worker threatened and abused?

The ethical conundrums multiply even as their resolution resists consensus. Sometimes the issues at stake can be clarified through historical perspective, by investigating certain singular figures in the past whose lives seem to encapsulate those issues and whose reputations have shifted, in tandem with shifting cultural values, through time. In this regard few lives are more emblematic than John Brown's. Though African-Americans have always and overwhelmingly regarded John Brown as a noble, heroic figure, few whites have. And while the civil rights movement produced a limited shift in attitude, very few white historians have written with any sympathy for the violent tactics John Brown employed during the mid-1850s war to make Kansas a free state, or for his subsequent attempt in 1859 to lead a slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Though Nat Turner has also been dismissed by some white historians as a sort of crazed religious fanatic, too addled to tote up the overwhelming odds against the success of his rebellion, his somewhat more favorable press derives from the fact that he and those who joined his uprising were blacks, direct victims of the system they hoped to overthrow. Fighting on behalf of one's own liberation has been treated as more legitimate than fighting, as did John Brown (or the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, or the white freedom fighters during the civil rights era) for the liberation of somebody else. According to this canon of judgment, itself derived from capitalist ethics, morality is defined as devotion to one's self-interest.

For the abolitionist John Brown, the end of slavery could come only through the barrel of a gun. He practiced what he preached.

Historians for many generations have derided John Brown, a white man and a Northerner, as a meddling outsider, a self-appointed emancipator whose motives must be suspect because, unlike Nat Turner's cohorts, he himself did not suffer from slavery's barbarism and could therefore have no "real" interest in encouraging its overthrow. The historical profession long made much the same sort of indictment against the nonviolent abolitionist movement as a whole, essentially agreeing with Daniel Webster's notorious charge during the debates in Congress over the Compromise of 1850 that the "outside agitators" of the antislavery movement did nothing for the slave but secure his bonds more firmly than ever before; according to this perspective, the white South responded to moral condemnation not by inaugurating some

Martin Duberman, Distinguished Professor of History at CUNY, is the author of more than twenty books. His biography Paul Robeson *has just been reissued, and his novel* Haymarket *is available in paperback. He is currently completing another biography,* The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein.

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long-term process of gradual emancipation but rather by tightening up its system of surveillance and by honing its ideological defense of slavery as a "positive good," as an institution that brought the blessings of Christianity to a savage, benighted people.

But though Daniel Webster's moral compass was far off course, his incidental point was accurate: Until a bloody civil war—until violence—produced emancipation, there was little if any evidence that the institution of slavery was weakening, let alone moving toward extinction. On the contrary, those white Southerners who at the beginning of the nineteenth century had qualms about an institution so at odds with their own ringing declaration of independence from Britain had, by mid-century, and even in the border states, been silenced or converted to a proslavery ideology.

The antislavery movement had long managed to convince itself that over time, through patient agitation, the slave system would waste away. To hasten that end, it had relied on varied, presumably promising tactics: "moral suasion," compensation coupled with deportation, "non-extension" and political separation. Even these nonviolent strategies failed to find favor with several generations of white historians; William Lloyd Garrison and other like-minded antislavery leaders were long denounced as misguided fanatics who, under the guise of caring about the plight of the slaves, were actually motivated by their "displaced status" as political leaders in the North and their wish to reclaim their position of authority through the display of superior moral virtue. Alternately, the white (not the black) historical fraternity simply dismissed the abolitionists as deeply delusional, as disturbed busybodies, would-be martyrs, tortured neurotics.

The nonviolent antislavery movement has, over the past several decades, been considerably rehabilitated. Not so John Brown, purveyor and defender of violence as a necessary instrument for dislodging the deeply embedded, unyielding, unreformable institution of human slavery. Brown has continued to be denounced as everything from an incompetent businessman to a tyrannical father and husband to a dangerous sociopath. The distinguished historian C. Vann Woodward portrayed him as a "monomaniac," a man whose family history was riddled with insanity (it wasn't, in fact), thus presumably proving Brown's own. Part of the ongoing discomfort with Brown is due not solely to his advocacy of violence to free the slaves but also to his remarkable lack of racism—exceedingly rare in his own day, in the North as well as the South, and hardly commonplace in ours.

One of the outstanding achievements of David Reynolds's new biography, *John Brown, Abolitionist*, is to provide what is by far the fullest documentation to date of Brown's endorsement of full equality in every area of life for black people (he further demanded, incidentally, that girls be educated in the same way and in the same subjects as boys, and he was a compassionate sympathizer with the problems of working-class people and the elderly, as well as with the suffering of animals). For John Brown equality was not a theoretical stance but a daily practice. He forbade his family from ever discriminating in any way against people of color, had close friendships with many black people, deeply admired their culture and insisted on racial integration at every level. While living in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the late 1840s, he wrote a column for a black newspaper, tried to establish an "African high school" and in 1851 founded a black cadre called the League of Gileadites to combat the recent Fugitive Slave Act, which required white citizens to cooperate with authorities in recapturing escaped runaways. When the Brown family moved to North Elba, New York, they lived and worked in a colony of black people who cooperated in maintaining a subsistence economy.

It's not just Brown's legendary advocacy of violence that makes some whites uncomfortable; it's his remarkable lack of racism.

Reynolds helps us to see how extraordinary John Brown's racial views were by placing them within the context of his day, a context where white people everywhere assumed that blacks were *intrinsically* inferior and their natural state one of subordination. He quotes from both the popular press and the scientific journals of the day to demonstrate how pervasive such views were. The respected so-called science of phrenology, for example, "conclusively" demonstrated in its charts and arguments that Caucasians were properly associated with the ability to reason logically and to cultivate the arts, and Africans were rightly linked to unbridled passion, indolence and stupidity. Even some of those active in the antislavery movement could nonetheless be venomously racist; Reynolds cites the claim of the antislavery orator Cassius Clay that "I have studied the Negro character. They lack self-reliance—we can make nothing out of them. God has made them for the sun and the banana!"

Reynolds's biography is not the first to show *some* sympathy for John Brown; in recent years several professional historians have published books that at least partially defend his character and his actions (the most notable is probably Stephen Oates's *To Purge This Land With Blood*). Nor is Reynolds's biography itself an unguarded, unqualified vindication of Brown. Some of the author's ambivalence about aspects of Brown's career, particularly the events at Pottawatomie, Kansas, in 1856, seems warranted, though now and then merely indecisive.

As a work of historical writing, *John Brown, Abolitionist* is not without flaws. The book's first hundred pages are slow going indeed; as one plows through them, an impression may take root that Reynolds has limited stylistic flair and less narrative drive. But the impression is wrong, and I urge the reader to persevere; the bulk of the book proves to be absorbing, well written and beautifully documented. The only other place where I longed for a stronger editorial hand was during the attenuated discussion much later in the book of Brown's influence on American writers; the unduly long excursion seems more the product of an English professor's own specialty than any intrinsic necessity.

Interpretively, my only serious quarrel with Reynolds is over his treatment of Abraham Lincoln. Throughout the book I think he overestimates Lincoln's desire in the years immediately preceding the Civil War to hold the Union together and underestimates his antislavery convictions. Reynolds never once mentions either the Crittenden Compromise or Lincoln's decision to reprovision Charleston Harbor's Fort Sumter—a decision that precipitated war. The Crittenden Compromise in all likelihood would have passed the Congress and succeeded in holding the Union together—but at the expense of further extending slavery; Lincoln intervened directly with several Congressmen to help defeat the measure, an action strongly suggesting (as does his decision at Sumter) that in his actual, if unannounced, hierarchy of values preventing the spread of slavery came *first* and the Union second.

But not all historians would agree with me; and even if they did, my complaints, taken together, amount to little when compared with the many strengths of

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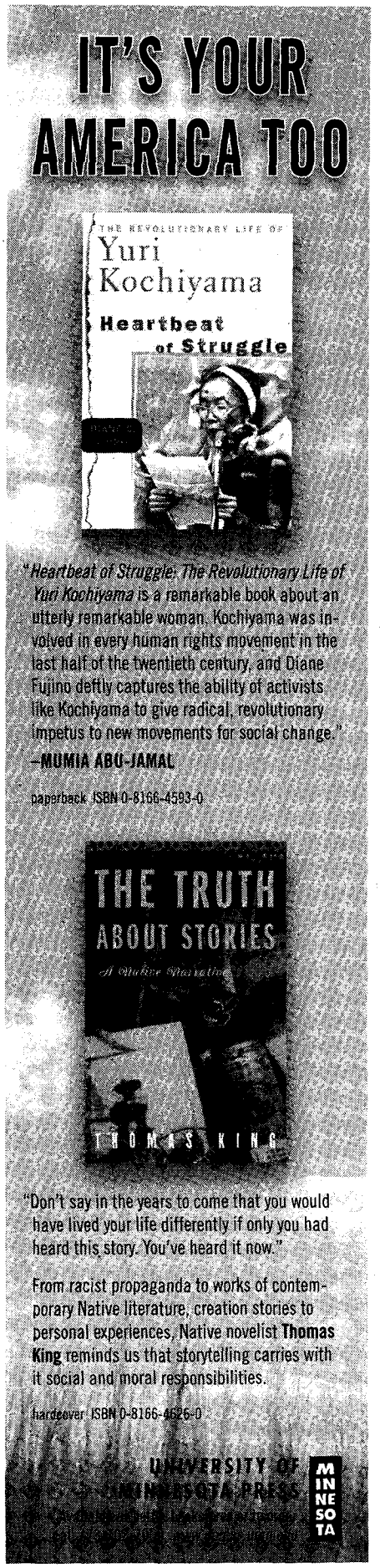
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Reynolds's book. Perhaps these are best seen by focusing on how he treats the most controversial episode in Brown's career: the killings at Pottawatomie during the height of the mini civil war there between those struggling to bring the territory into the Union as a free or slave state. Reynolds, first of all, does a superb job of contextualizing the episode, of making it clear that during the struggle over statehood violence was everywhere employed. Thousands of Missourians (the so-called "border ruffians") had poured into Kansas in a determined effort to swing the area, when it came time to elect a territorial legislature, into the proslavery column.

The border ruffians showed no hesitation in terrorizing polling officials, employing massive electoral fraud, using outright violence to silence antislavery settlers (one free-state leader was hacked to death in front of his wife) and, once finally in control of the legislature, passing "black laws" that mandated sentences of years of hard labor for anyone who dared to write, or even had in their possession, antislavery literature. President Franklin Pierce and his Administration overlooked such proslavery atrocities and publicly announced that nothing either illegal or immoral had taken place in Kansas; Pierce even declared the fraudulently elected proslavery legislature to be unquestionably legitimate and denounced the opposition to it as treasonable.

As if to emphasize the point that the federal government was determined to defend the institution of slavery, it was at just this time that South Carolina Senator Preston Brooks approached the desk of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, the outspoken antislavery orator, on the floor of the Senate and caned him so viciously that he broke his hard gutta-percha walking stick into splinters and left a seriously injured Sumner unconscious. Brooks's violent act made him an instant hero throughout the South, where the culture of vigilante justice, including the slow burning of offending slaves over a banked fire, had long been associated with "chivalric" manliness. The South's leading newspaper, the *Richmond Enquirer*, in hailing Brooks's murderous assault, declared that "impudent" antislavery senators were "a pack of curs" who "must be lashed into submission."

It was at this point, and in this climate, that an outraged John Brown decided to go on the offensive. As a contemporary journalist quoted by Reynolds put it, he "brought Southern tactics to the Northern side." Brown hadn't gone to Kansas (as a host of hostile white historians have insisted) with the specific intent of waging war. But now, with the murder of antislavery men continuing in the territory and with the federal government overtly siding with those determined to spread the barbaric institution, John Brown decided that the time for retaliation had come. He led a small band of supporters, including several of his sons, who singled out five men active in terrorizing antislavery settlers, dragged them from their homes and killed them. Brown claimed—and Reynolds persuades us that "by the best evidence" his claim is true—that he himself did not participate in the killings. But he did direct them.

Retaliatory violence is violence nonetheless. There can be no prettifying the fact that John Brown, deliberately and proactively, saw to it that five people were slaughtered at Pottawatomie. To the principled pacifist, for whom the taking of human life is never acceptable, that must remain the bottom line and disapproval must remain unqualified. I feel closer to that position than to any other. But then, I've never been a brutalized slave, a Jew in a concentration camp, an abused prisoner of war or a hunted Native American. But neither was John Brown. The chief indignity he'd suffered had been to his Calvinist conscience and to his compassion for the suffering of the oppressed. Reynolds concludes that "the Pottawatomie affair was indeed a crime, but it was a war crime committed against proslavery settlers by a man who saw slavery itself as an unprovoked war of one race against another."

I can't do better than that, though I wish Reynolds had taken the argument to another level and posed some of the difficult questions that are intrinsic to any discussion of the utility and morality of violence as a tool for producing social change. Most of the populace seems content most of the time to let the state decide when the taking of life is justified; state-sponsored wars produce "heroes," not "criminals." But by what authority, human or divine, does the state decide what countries are to be invaded, what villages bombed, which individuals tortured or executed? And why do so many of us, with a mix of relief and indifference, leave such decisions in the hands of those who rarely suffer any personal consequences from them?

In line with this, I can't help but wonder whether Reynolds, who calls Brown's action at Pottawatomie a "crime," would apply the same label to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising? Or the fight against Franco in Spain? Or, during the colonial period, to

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the actions of anyone who joined Toussaint L'Ouverture in fighting the French in Haiti? The questions, to be sure, are in a sense unfair: Reynolds is not a professional philosopher or an ethicist. Still, we all, inescapably, spin theories and pass judgments. This is especially true of historians claiming to "objectively" re-create the past; when we select evidence and decide which portions of it to emphasize, we are inevitably engaged in crafting narratives—though most historians prefer to ignore the fact—that are crowded with implicit, if usually unconscious and unexamined, value judgments.

When it comes to John Brown's more celebrated attack on Harpers Ferry, Reynolds has little trouble issuing judgments, and he does so brilliantly. I found his intricate argument that John Brown's raid was neither poorly conceived nor quixotic entirely persuasive, even though Brown's hesitation at a critical moment to escape into the mountains does continue to seem mystifying (to Reynolds, too). Where Brown went astray was in his optimistic expectation that local blacks would quickly join his band and, their ranks thus enlarged, turn the insurrection into a swelling tide. Brown had perhaps overstudied the successful slave rebellions in the West Indies (the uprising in Jamaica, L'Ouverture's liberation of Haiti) and underplayed the peculiar conditions of the heavily fortified South. Blacks were indeed as shrewd and as fiercely desirous of freedom as John Brown thought—but that meant shrewd enough to realize that the chances for success were slight and that their subsequent punishment would be ferociously brutal.

David Reynolds, to his enormous credit, has restored to us a man "too honest to succeed as a capitalist," too attuned to the sufferings of others to tend closely to his own, too principled to be easily recognized as an American hero. At the close of his biography, Reynolds, in a profoundly moving way, recounts Brown's nobility of behavior in jail, on trial and awaiting the gallows. No madman or fraud could conceivably have matched his astonishing eloquence and spiritual grandeur. This was a special man indeed, made so by the utter sincerity of his egalitarian convictions and his willingness to sacrifice all in their name. Reynolds has managed—long after someone else should have—to restore to us a flawed but deeply impressive humanitarian figure who makes the moral midgets currently dominating our national discourse appear, by contrast, the ignoble specks they actually are. ■

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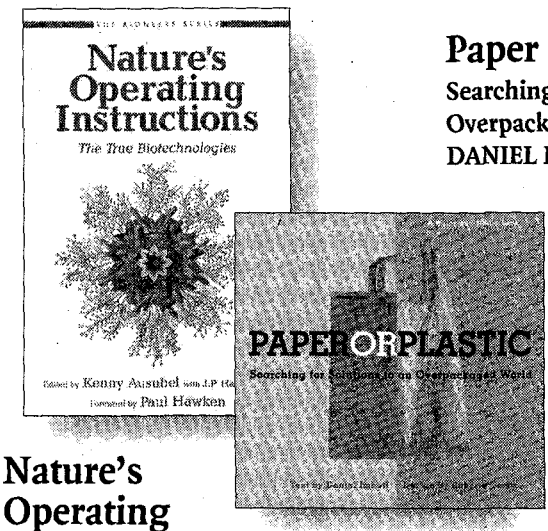

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Trainspotting

BY DREW FAUST

BOUND FOR CANAAN: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America.
By Fergus M. Bordewich. Amistad. 540 pp. $27.95.

As the twentieth century came to an end, Americans grew increasingly interested in the history of the nineteenth. Civil War commemorations, re-enactments, books and films proliferated, depicting the nation's traumatic division, as well as chronicling its redemptive narratives of suffering, heroism and, of course, freedom. The emancipation struggle, however, rested a bit uncertainly in this Civil War enthusiasm, sometimes ignored, often subordinated in a story that focused on battle. Yet the eagerness to understand national identity that has animated this attention to history cannot be separated from the American dilemma of race, with its roots in slavery and branches stretched across our own time. As the 1990s saw a doubling in the number of Civil War books published each year, it also witnessed an extraordinary flourishing of interest in the Underground Railroad, a phenomenon that in the course of the decade yielded two federal laws, state programs involving millions of dollars for preservation and memorialization, and activities in schools and communities across the nation.

Under the directive of the 1998 National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act, the National Park Service now manages a program designed to link state and local efforts into a "mosaic of community, regional and national stories" by certifying the authenticity of Underground Railroad sites and encouraging preservation and education programs. The Underground Railroad, the National Park Service proclaims, "bridged the divides of race, religion, sectional differences and... joined the American ideals of liberty and freedom expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the extraordinary actions of ordinary men and women." The Network to Freedom program emphasizes the "historical significance of the Underground Railroad in the eradication of slavery and the evolution of our national civil rights movement, and its relevance in fostering the spirit of racial harmony and national reconciliation."

The assumptions and attractions of this history are clear and explicit. Ordinary people undertake acts of heroism motivated by our national principles. Their efforts are effective in diluting the stain of slavery. Blacks and whites work together in a spirit of racial harmony that remains an unrealized national ideal and a still-elusive reality more than a century later. Just as the Underground Railroad freed nineteenth-century slaves from bondage, so it can offer modern Americans a promise of freedom from—or at least an alternative to—the historical burden of racism and slavery. This is an inspirational story, one far easier to present in school curriculums and in popular commemoration than the divisive and complex experience of American slavery. The Underground Railroad speaks powerfully to what historian David Blight has called "our need to find an ennobling past."

But we should be wary of a history built on need and desire. The present always uses the past for its own purposes, but the best historical writing attempts to contain that inescapable impulse in order to understand history in its own terms. The Underground Railroad has always made that difficult. It is a metaphor; it was never a railroad, nor was it under the ground. The term emerged in the 1830s to describe networks of support and communication assisting slaves escaping from bondage to the North and freedom. The imperatives of secrecy prevented extensive documentation of illegal and necessarily clandestine activities; romanticized memories exaggerated levels of formal organization, coherence and extensiveness; prevailing racial assumptions shaped recollection. By the end of the nineteenth century, a popular mythology of the Underground Railroad had arisen that celebrated altruistic whites serving as "conductors" for the benefit of largely passive black "passengers." Legend claimed locations across the North as former "stations" on the Railroad, often with a hidden passage or room offered as definitive evidence for a site's authenticity.

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s sparked a revolution in the historical understanding of slavery and abolition and brought significant revisions to the Underground Railroad narrative, as the activities of blacks both as fugitives and "conductors" claimed a more central place in the story. Nevertheless, the power of myth continued to challenge historical accuracy, even as interest in the Railroad grew.

Fergus Bordewich's *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* enters this complex historical—and political—tradition. His very subtitle suggests how passionately he identifies with the moral agenda of the Underground Railroad story, which he regards as "an answer to slavery's legacy of hurt and shame." But his claims for it are hardly limited to its moral significance. The Underground Railroad was, he asserts, "the country's first racially integrated civil rights movement," "one of the most ambitious political undertakings in American history," "an even greater record of personal bravery and self-sacrifice than is generally known," "a movement with far-reaching political and moral consequences that changed relations between the races in ways more radical than any that...would be seen again until the second half of the twentieth century."

To make such claims, it is necessary to establish what the Underground Railroad actually was, to capture this poorly documented, ill-defined, elusive and allusive concept. The term has been employed so imprecisely that it has frequently been applied to all flights from slavery to freedom in the antebellum period. This would include escapes that predated the name itself, which only came into use when the emergence of railroads supplied the metaphor. Bordewich follows this custom and invokes the Underground Railroad regardless of the formal or organized nature of a slave's passage to freedom and regardless of the fugitive's self-conscious awareness of a structured network of assistance. For example, one of Bordewich's heroes, a bondsman named Arnold Gragston, who ferried many slaves across the Ohio before eventually fleeing himself, later responded to a question about the Underground Railroad by noting, "I don't know as we called it anything." But Bordewich does not quote this remark. Instead he uses Gragston as one of many examples to show that the Underground Railroad by the late 1830s had "taken recognizable

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form," developed "trunk lines," an identifiable leadership structure of "conductors" and members and patterns of "sophisticated coordination." The Underground Railroad becomes a reality for the modern historian that it was not for the nineteenth-century participant.

Indeed, most slaves who fled bondage did not benefit from an organized network of assistance and communication. The majority of those who ran away stayed within the South, hiding in woods and swamps, disappearing into cities, causing steady and significant disruption of the South's "peculiar institution," but never crossing the Mason-Dixon line to freedom. Fugitives who did escape northward came overwhelmingly from the border states. As Bordewich himself acknowledges, "Very few successful freedom seekers were from the Deep South." Eighty percent of Southern-born blacks counted in the Ontario census of 1861 were from the three states of Virginia, Maryland and Kentucky.

Bordewich writes of a "hemorrhaging of fugitive slaves." Yet these slaves were more a trickle than a flood, their origins geographically limited, their numbers a tiny fraction in comparison to those who remained captive or never succeeded in their efforts to claim freedom. Bordewich generously estimates that the Railroad transported approximately 100,000 "passengers" in the course of the nineteenth century. Even if Bordewich's figure is right, it is a small fraction of the slave population. In 1860 there were 4 million slaves living in the United States, and we can only estimate the total number of those caught in bondage from 1800 to 1860, which is of course the population from which Bordewich's figure of 100,000 came. Each successful fugitive meant a life transformed and saved from slavery's oppression, and we must not discount the importance of every act of self-liberation by daring and resourceful fugitives. But if we emphasize the reassuring myths of the Underground Railroad over the exploitative realities of the slave system, we distort the past by ignoring the experience of the many for the dramatic and inspiring stories of an exceptional and unrepresentative few—overwhelmingly from the border states, overwhelmingly young, overwhelmingly male.

Although the numerical impact of the Underground Railroad on the slave system was limited, the political and symbolic force of fugitives was, as Bordewich argues, significant. White Southerners came

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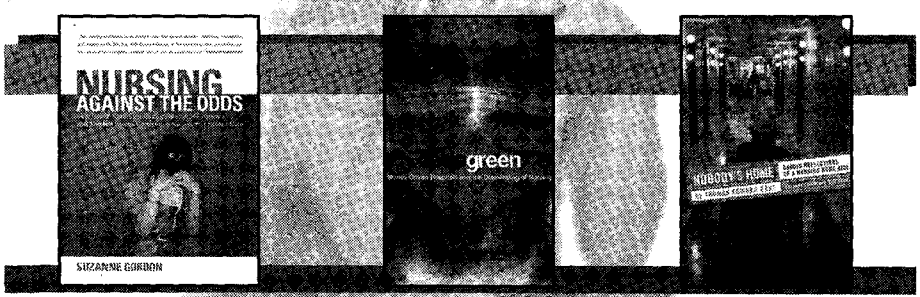

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to believe in an Underground Railroad far more organized and vast than anything that actually existed. Their consequent sense of threat and anger would contribute meaningfully to mounting sectional tensions. The South's escalating demands that fugitives be returned from Northern states led to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, a measure that proved incendiary by putting the weight of federal law on the side of slave catchers who came north to retrieve runaways, some of whom had been living in freedom for decades. The battles over fugitives across the North made it impossible to compartmentalize slavery as a Southern concern. The fugitive law made slavery the property of the nation.

Bordewich explores a number of these confrontations between slavery and freedom in some detail, using them as a vehicle for expanding his consideration of antislavery activism. He does so, however, in a manner that further muddles his definition of the Underground Railroad. John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry establishes him, in Bordewich's view, as "the apotheosis of the Underground Railroad," while the federal policy of welcoming tens of thousands of slaves who fled to Union lines during the Civil War is treated as a version of the Underground Railroad on a "scale that would help destroy the plantation economy of the Confederacy." Redefining every action that weakened slavery as part of the work of the Underground Railroad makes it far easier to argue for its impact and significance, but it also blurs definition and understanding.

The abolition movement and the Underground Railroad, Bordewich acknowledges, "were never completely congruent." But his wishful exaggeration of their convergences has produced a book that is about both and fully focused on neither. He admits he has "not written an encyclopedic survey of the underground," though he relates many of its most dramatic tales and vividly demonstrates the extraordinary bravery and commitment of its black and white participants. But he tells these stories as part of a broad overview of slavery and antislavery that is distorted by its subordination to the Underground Railroad narrative. His presentation of slavery includes fundamental factual errors; for example, 4,000 slave owners did not own two-thirds of the South's slaves in 1860; US Census data, as cited in Peter Kolchin's *Unfree Labor*, indicates that 1 percent of slave holders (3,830 in 1860) owned 2.4 percent of slaves. And the portrait of abolition that emerges here is a curious one. Without the Underground Railroad, Bordewich suggests, it might "never have become anything more than a vast lecture hall in which right-minded, white Americans could comfortably agree that slavery was evil." The last half-century of scholarship on abolition has advanced quite a different view.

The Gag Rule controversy, all but ignored by Bordewich, offers an illustration of the point. The Congressional battle over how to treat the tens of thousands of petitions forced upon Washington by antislavery activists—particularly women—became, under the leadership of John Quincy Adams, almost as powerful a challenge to the North's compartmentalization of slavery as the Fugitive Slave Act would later prove. The near absence of this conflict from Bordewich's book illustrates an important shortcoming of his portrait of the antislavery movement. In its focus on indi-

IN OUR ORBIT

In October 1987 *The Nation* ran an exposé of Henry Kissinger that revealed his winking approval of the Argentine dirty war. A few months later, at a dinner party hosted by then-publisher Arthur Carter, the former Secretary of State approached the magazine's editor with a question. "Tell me," Kissinger said, "How is it that a short article in an obscure journal such as yours...resulted in sixty people holding placards denouncing me a few months ago at the airport when I got off a plane in Copenhagen?" Victor Navasky smiled and replied, "I guess we have readers in Denmark."

Longtime *Nation* readers will recognize in that sly offhand remark the spirit of rebellion and insouciant wit that characterized Navasky's sixteen-year tenure as editor and continues to guide him as publisher. To read his delightful memoir *A Matter of Opinion* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27) is to see how he has embodied that spirit throughout his career, from his early days at *Monocle*, a satirical rag that sent one of its editors to challenge Barry Goldwater in the 1964 Republican primary—with Abraham Lincoln's 1864 platform—to his sabbatical in the mid-'90s at Harvard Business School, where he played the role of anticapitalist foil. (When a professor asked for a list of pros and cons specific to a case study, Navasky recalls, "I got a big laugh and a lot of little snickers when I mentioned that unions can increase productivity.") And for readers in search of *Nation* gossip, he abundantly delivers, without sacrificing the tact and discretion that helps him maintain the magazine's big, fractious ideological tent.

Navasky writes with a raconteur's casual erudition, a style that resembles a chat over cocktails more than a classroom lecture—and you know he's telling you only a sliver of what he's learned in the magazine business. Much of the fun comes from following him as he builds a network of increasingly high-profile colleagues, including some prominent conservatives who share his devotion to opinion journalism, notably William Buckley. Navasky seems to move effortlessly through the world of New York intellectuals and politicians, making friends the way others open doors. But even as he recounts his rising stature among the liberal elite—he emerges as a leading champion of the First Amendment, as sentinel for the Hollywood blacklist, as the financier who steered *The Nation* from the red (so to speak) to the black—he always cuts back with puckish, self-effacing charm. Hired as an expert witness in the largest libel case in American history, he remembers, "Norman Roy Grutman, *Penthouse*'s flamboyant and voluble counsel, told me that he had great admiration for me. In fact, he laid it on so thick that I began to be suspicious. Even I didn't have that much admiration for me."

A Matter of Opinion is packed with such stories, and Navasky's spry reflections enliven his tribute to America's oldest weekly. Despite the levity of his prose, though, his subject—the role of the opinion journal in public life—is a serious one. For Navasky, there is no democracy without an open, freewheeling conversation about our politics and culture, and he makes a convincing case that independent opinion magazines are among the few remaining places where that sort of discussion occurs. Navasky has helped keep the conversation crackling for decades, and American journalism is richer for it. ■

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viduals acting heroically within the loose networks of the Underground Railroad, it makes little room for the role of politics in the fight against slavery. In Bordewich's interpretation, the Underground Railroad, rather than any actions in the political realm, set the stage for slavery's demise. The Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, shifting party politics, debates over the territories—all of which heightened the tensions around slavery—are marginalized or entirely overlooked.

A study of the Underground Railroad need not address every dimension of the antebellum struggle over slavery. But a book that seeks to establish the Underground Railroad as the defining force in a "war for the soul of America" and that portrays a range of other antislavery actions as virtual manifestations of the Railroad must carefully weigh the impact of the Underground Railroad in relation to other antislavery endeavors. Bordewich does not offer such a balanced evaluation but provides instead a fragmented version of the movement against slavery, which he claims had the Underground Railroad at its heart.

In 2004 The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center opened in Cincinnati, Ohio, signaling a continuing American fascination with the extraordinary tales of individuals who acted decisively for freedom. Fergus Bordewich's telling of these stories will find a ready audience, for his book represents a highly readable, richly detailed, inspiring contribution that integrates many discoveries and revisions of recent decades—most notably, stories of black agency—into an accessible narrative for the general reader. But it offers a vision of the past too much determined by the hopes and needs of the present. The story of slavery and of the efforts to overthrow it should not be seen primarily or exclusively through the lens of a movement whose contours can only hazily be identified or defined, a movement that offers a feel-good story of the past that may divert us from the real burdens of slavery's legacy in American life. ■

Southern Man

DARRYL LORENZO WELLINGTON

DEAR SENATOR: A Memoir by the Daughter of Strom Thurmond.
By Essie Mae Washington-Williams and William Stadiem. Regan. 223 pp. $24.95.

In South Carolina, when the subject of favorite son Strom Thurmond and his illegitimate, biracial daughter comes up, the first thing you invariably hear is, "At least he took care of her." The comment pithily conceals as much as it backhandedly reveals. It has the same breezy effect as the knowing wink and the throaty chuckle. Like its brethren, it superimposes cordiality. It hints at a vague, unacknowledged understanding, but above all it maintains silence.

"At least" reveals that the speaker isn't blithely unaware of the carnality of the days of legalized segregation. The speaker has a not too indelicately explicit understanding that—as in most relations between conquerors and the conquered—white men leveraged their position to obtain sexual favors from black women. Some would say that all such relationships carry a stigma and should be characterized as rape. Others might hold out the possibility for deeper intimacies, despite the overwhelmingly lopsided pressures on black women. But the stories and their particulars aren't lingered upon. Like much else having to do with racism, lynching, civil rights–era violence and, yes, even slavery, it's a taboo subject, a vale of tears that many people feel is best left alone. That is why, when Strom Thurmond's secret daughter is spoken of, it's with the immediate interpolation that "at least" Thurmond was better than generations of white men who treated their illegitimate, biracial children with comparative ungenerosity.

The modern South is often admired for its courtesy, but the courtesy between the races that so often surprises Northerners reflects, in reality, a prickly truce, a bargain made in the aftermath of the painful civil rights battles of the not-too-distant past. These days segregationists are rarely held to task, so long as they never overtly promoted lynching. On tours of many of the

Darryl Lorenzo Wellington is a writer in Charleston, South Carolina. His work has appeared in the Washington Post Book World, *the* Christian Science Monitor, Boston Review *and* Dissent.

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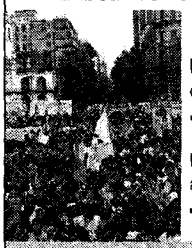

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historic plantation estates of Charleston, South Carolina, the word "slave" is carefully avoided; instead black slaves are described as "servants." History is evaded—sometimes overtly distorted—so as to avoid any confrontation over integration, white flight and the unfinished civil rights revolution. This brittle truce, unhealthy but functional, is at the heart of the social adjustment of the modern South.

A culture of silence exacts a heavy toll. It allows the strange coexistence of Confederate Memorial Day celebrations and Martin Luther King Day parades, of public buildings and bridges named after former segregationists and streets named after civil rights leaders. But it also entrenches attitudes, leaving vast segments of the population disillusioned, their anguish internalized, their expectations diminished. It may not influence day-to-day interaction between the races, but in the sphere of politics, a culture of silence siphons the energy for progressivism; it curtails discourse and emboldens reactionary conservatism.

There is little in Essie Mae Washington-Williams's memoir, *Dear Senator*, that will challenge this culture of silence. On the contrary, *Dear Senator* is primarily an unapologetic account of keeping silence and the curious psychological manipulations this requires. Now 78, Washington-Williams has lived in California for the past thirty years or so, but substantial stretches of her formative years were spent in South Carolina and Georgia, where she absorbed the Southern tradition of "shutting up" in the face of racial unpleasantness. Late in 2003, following the revelation that she was Strom Thurmond's secret daughter—a revelation that startled many white but few black people—Washington-Williams was briefly at the center of a media blitz. *Dear Senator* tries to make her story resonate with the power of the truth revealed, even though "the truth" was conveniently revealed only after her biological father's death, and dismayingly late in Essie Mae Washington-Williams's long life.

Washington-Williams's peculiar journey began in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, where she was raised by her aunt, who she believed was her mother until the age of 13. Coatesville was a small town, but racially mixed. Washington-Williams was shocked when she first glimpsed hard-core Southern segregation in the town of Edgefield, South Carolina, the locus of her newly discovered heritage. Unbeknownst to her, she was the progeny of a 16-year-old cleaning woman and the scion of an important white Southern family. When she turned 16, Essie Mae journeyed to Edgefield to visit her biological mother, who escorted her on a fairy tale–like, impromptu visit to her biological father, Judge Strom Thurmond of the law office Thurmond and Thurmond.

The still-young Thurmond was handsome, educated, authoritative, and Essie Mae's mother gazed upon him as if he were a demigod. "You have a lovely young daughter," Thurmond told her. Essie Mae writes that she longed to hear him say, "We have a lovely daughter." But his manner disowned her. Yes, he was full of avuncular advice, but little warmth, and physical contact was strictly limited. The boundaries established at this first meeting would not change for the rest of Thurmond's life.

The adolescent Essie Mae is skeptical of her mother's insistence that Judge Thurmond truly loves her, that they would be married if not for the prejudices of the Deep South. She is surprised by the way her mother absolves Thurmond's idolization of the legendary bigot Ben Tillman. "All that hate talk is just politics," her mother says, to Essie Mae's surprise. Surveying the miserable living conditions of her Southern relations, she is unimpressed by Thurmond's benevolence. When, shortly after her visit to his office, $200 is secretly spirited to her mother's home, she writes:

> Didn't my father want to see me again? He could have come, just as she did. Were they trying to buy my mother off so that she wouldn't shame them in some way? Was there any love here, or was this some kind of hush money?... I went back into the filthy toilet, locked the door, and broke down in tears.

Though Washington-Williams describes herself as conflicted, she refuses to break with her father. Despite other options, she accepts Thurmond's offer to fund her education at South Carolina State in Orangeburg. At this point a note of resignation and compliance creeps into *Dear Senator*, and it worsens over time. In her determination to always "try to look on the bright side," as she puts it, the adult Essie Mae Washington-Williams comes to resemble her mother. Tellingly, the words "hush money" are never again used in the accusatory sense.

Meanwhile, Thurmond climbs the political ladder. First he becomes a South Carolina governor (later a senator). As he ascends, so does his racist vitriol. In 1948

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he runs for President under the auspices of the self-proclaimed Dixiecrat Party, whose slogan is that segregation is essential "to the protection and purity of the White and Negro races." "I wasn't sure if this was my father talking, or the ghost of Adolf Hitler," Washington-Williams writes. Elsewhere she writes of her cash allowance, observing that he was "a false father, but he was certainly a generous one."

Essie Mae's mother dies, in dire circumstances, ignored in her last days by Thurmond, who by then has married the first of two wives. Yet not even this convinces Essie Mae that it's time to unburden herself morally. She marries, and when she tells her husband she is Strom Thurmond's daughter, he is shocked. He discourages her from accepting Thurmond's "Benjamin Franklins." But the secret meetings, and the monetary gifts, continue. By the mid-1950s, when Thurmond filibusters a civil rights bill, Essie Mae merely appends a woeful "Oh daddy." She has grown accustomed to his ways. When she does confront him, she appears, like her mother, to largely accept Thurmond's explanation that his racist stances are "just politics." It's a sad full circle.

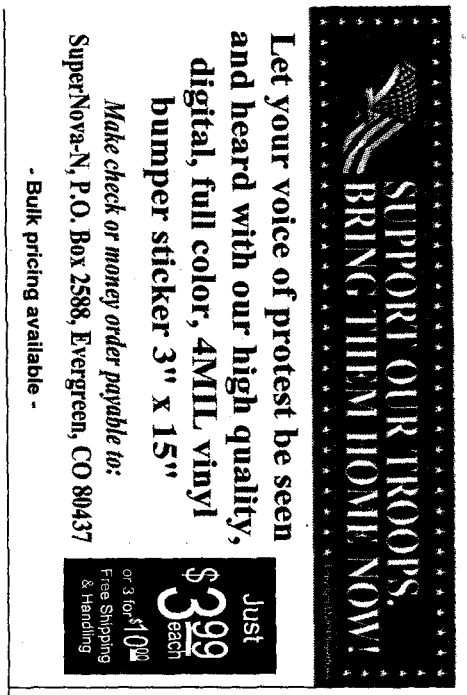
The rest of *Dear Senator* is more of the same. Essie Mae Washington-Williams complains of a distant father who treats her with less than parental affection—"segregated love," she calls it. Given the social pressures of the 1940s, '50s and '60s, for those decades she remains a sympathetic character. However, she becomes less sympathetic in later decades—still agreeing to secret back-door meetings, still protecting Thurmond's secret, still denying that Thurmond is her father when asked point-blank by journalists.

For obvious reasons, Washington-Williams seems all too ready to believe in the "new Strom Thurmond" who emerged in the late 1960s and '70s, a reconstructed, progressive Southern leader. This is a patronizing myth concocted by Thurmond's publicity machine. Having defected from the Democratic to the Republican Party, Thurmond adapted to the phenomenon of a growing black electorate. He did so by making a black appointment here and there, and showing the simple decency to support black colleges. He resisted civil rights legislation (or was dragged tooth and nail into supporting it) and, most tellingly, resisted large-scale federal programs on behalf of the poor and minorities. Under Thurmond's speciously benevolent stewardship, South Carolina lagged near the bottom in most indices of quality of life, in level of education, nutritional standards and environmental cleanliness. He treated the poor and minorities the same way he treated Washington-Williams—with plantation-master pork-barrel politics, social band-aids and buy-offs, but no real love. Washington-Williams fails to see the analogy.

The title *Dear Senator* suggests a personal letter addressed to her father, but it's a soft-spoken letter indeed. The obvious questions you would expect her to ask her late father—*Dear Father, if you have abandoned your segregation policies and if you regret your earlier stances, why can't you and I appear in the light of day and at least eat in public? How can this be 1990 and yet you won't share a Coke with me in public because I'm half black?*—aren't pointedly raised.

In fact, if Strom Thurmond had bothered to include Washington-Williams in his will, the truth might never have come to light. But Washington-Williams's "generous" father failed to leave her any of his "Benjamin Franklins," so she got a lawyer and sued the Thurmond estate; within months she was interviewed by Dan Rather on *60 Minutes*. (The suit was resolved when the Thurmond estate acknowledged her paternity.) If her story had been revealed earlier—merely as a point of fact—it might have provoked a long-postponed conversation in South Carolina about its violent history of racial domination. It might have encouraged a profound re-examination of what segregation and Southern racial hysteria were all about. It could have exposed the hypocrisies buried beneath the South's culture of silence. But Washington-Williams blunted the impact of her story by withholding it for so long, and by failing to reflect on its meaning when she finally got around to telling it.

"In a way, my life began at seventy-eight, at least my life as who I really was," Washington-Williams writes. But the reader feels more pity than pride. No one has an obligation to be a hero, and Washington-Williams was born into an awkward and unusual situation that she did not choose, but it is difficult to find much courage in *Dear Senator*. For most of her life Essie Mae Washington-Williams sold her truth to the highest bidder, namely her father. As a woman of independent means, residing in California, working as a schoolteacher, the power to live without subterfuge had lain in her hands for quite some time. But she chose to remain silent, and this silence is the real story of her memoir, *Dear Senator*—the story of a lifelong compromise with white supremacy. ■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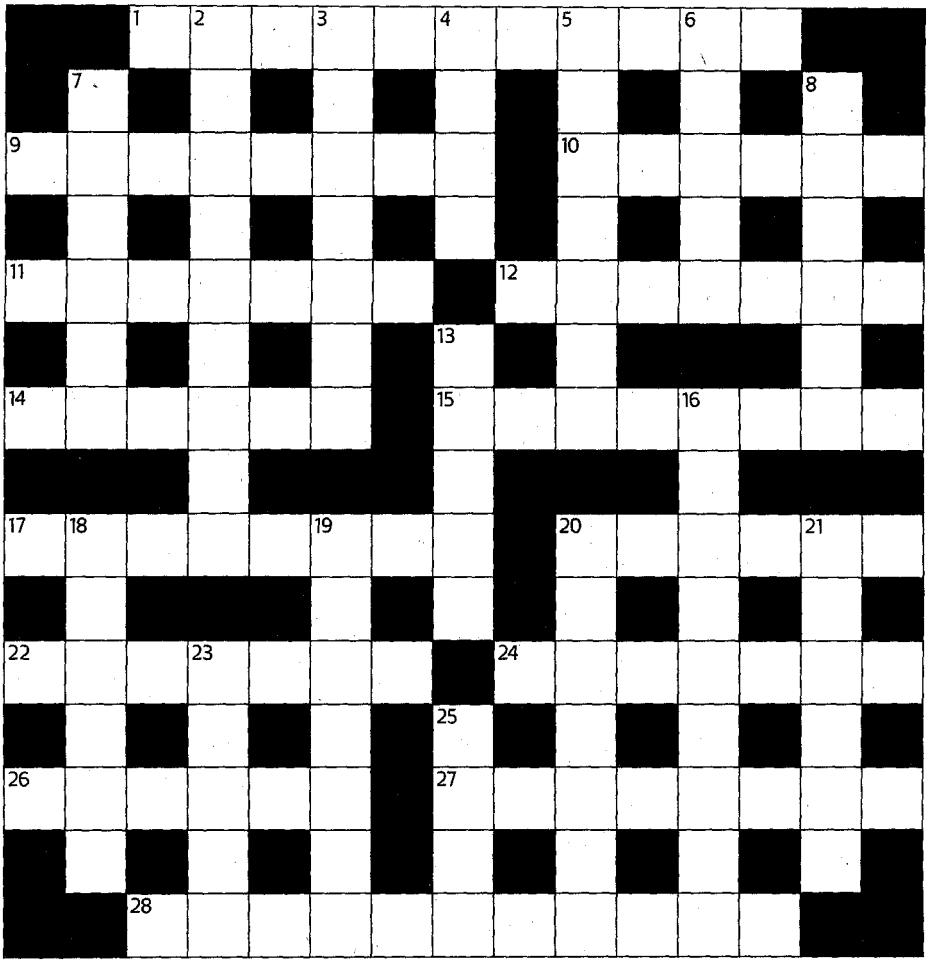

ACROSS

1 and **18** down One went to court in a novel way, taking a more modern skill with him to see 25 and 20. (11,6)

9 I get found in a wind that affects the French—which might call for a new hearing, in case that was wrong. (8)

10 Gardner and Cheney go where the late 20... (6)

11 ...arrived very much involved at another of his palaces. (7)

12 Perhaps dies at sea, which is rough—because of sickness, possibly. (7)

14 We are supposed to be that which started out constitutionally. (6)

15 Turn the handle with plumbing equipment necessary for the passing of air. (8)

17 It shows how many 14 get overexcited this year, possibly. (8)

20 See 25 down

22 A doctrine of inevitable decline that gives the French too much in a "yen," sort of. (7)

24 A large wardrobe should have more air in it. (7)

26 Given for a while to the Italian type, but it might end up in the soup. (6)

27 One might speak on this, though it's time corn got produced here. (8)

28 The joint action of agents, when the cry gets in, is difficult. (11)

DOWN

2 Supposedly where to find Johnny, if fast getting into trouble. (2,3,4)

3 One might think it ought to be making a racket, but it's really only very dirty! (7)

4 and **13** What one breaks into when afraid of perspiration caused by the sniffles? (4,5)

5 When a rainstorm finds a Scotsman around, you might rather expect him to be an ex-Persian. (7)

6 Where the British are found on a rough sea, according to authoritative proclamation. (5)

7 Couldn't you really see this wartime plane? (6)

8 Comes to the surface when Robert is at the plate, evidently. (4,2)

13 See 4

16 What one with a good hand hopes to win for French/American state might suggest quite a medley. (9)

18 See 1 across

19 Concerning what the doctor might feel, this is what something 3 should get. (7)

20 Are uncertain when taking the wrong seat, but the stuff you breathe circulates well when it does. (7)

21 To pour this is wrong, but it takes a certain amount of pull to do so. (6)

23 When Hamlin was, they had to pay the piper! (5)

25 and **20** across When his arm was stuck in a rock, he had no trouble pulling it out. (4,6)

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W	E	E		K	N	I	G	H	T		P	L	A	N
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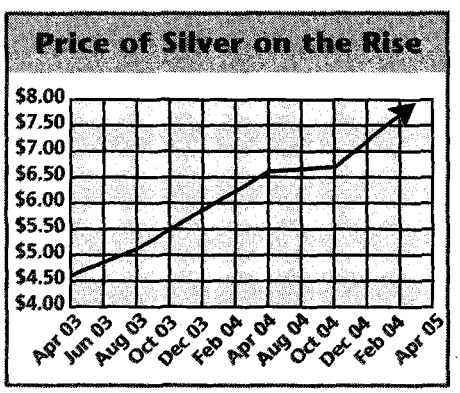
Imagine if you could step back in time to hold in your hands the historic U.S. 90% silver coins from a half century ago. How much would they be worth? Hundreds of millions of dollars were officially melted down by the government decades ago, until at last they were gone. Now there is nothing but copper, nickel and zinc.



BONUS authentic Pre-1922 Morgan Silver Dollar with each half pound of silver coins you order!
CALL NOW!

ORDER MORE AND SAVE

Quarter Pound Bag
U.S. Silver Coins $99 + $11.95 S&H

Half Pound Bag
$182 + $11.95 S&H SAVE $27.95
(Plus BONUS Morgan Silver Dollar!)

Full Pound Bag
$359 + $11.95 S&H SAVE $82.85
(Plus BONUS *Two* Morgan Silver Dollars!)

The surviving American silver coins are becoming more sought-after with each passing day.

CASH IN ON THE SILVER MARKET NOW

Today, demand for vintage U.S. silver coins is at all-time highs, with record-breaking prices. Dealers report the strongest coin market since the 1970s! What's more, the price of silver itself is roaring upward, reaching prices not seen for years. Will it rocket past the $50 per ounce mark it set in 1980? Time will tell, but thousands of savvy coin buyers are now stashing away old U.S. silver coins, anticipating a bright future.

NOTICE: Due to recent increases in the price of silver coins this advertised price cannot be guaranteed and is subject to change without notice. Supplies are limited, call now to avoid disappointment.

MONEY-BACK SATISFACTION GUARANTEE

You must be 100% satisfied with your bag of 90% silver coins or return it via insured mail within 30 days of receipt for a prompt refund.

BONUS MORGAN DOLLAR FOR FIRST 50 CALLERS

The first 50 callers will also receive this

TOLL-FREE 24 HOURS A DAY

1-800-721-0383

Promotional Code SCF102-01

Please mention Promotional Code when you call.

We can also accept your check by phone.
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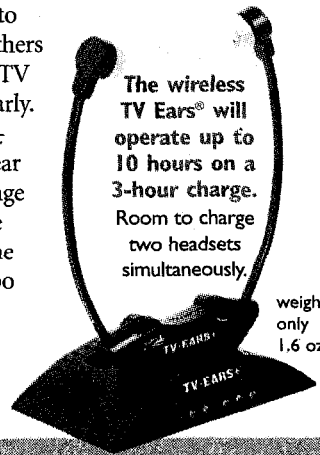
TV Ears® has high customer satisfaction!
To prove it, we are offering a special
$20 savings and FREE shipping
The cheaper, commercial headsets are limited in output and amplify all sound at the same level. TV Ears® is powerful (120 db), and features voice enhancement technology to make hard to hear words easier to understand and background sounds are kept in the background.
TV·EARS+

Doctor recommended TV Ears® has helped thousands of people hear television clearly without turning up the volume.

More than 28 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. If you struggle to hear TV, or family members complain the TV is too loud, you need TV Ears®! Doctor recommended, TV Ears® is a powerful new device that has helped thousands of people with mild, moderate, or severe hearing loss hear the television clearly without turning up the volume. Now you can listen to television at your own level while others may adjust the volume to fit theirs. TV Ears® helps you hear every word clearly. Imagine watching your favorite programs, and actually being able to hear every word and sound—it will change your life! If you are dealing with the frustration and arguments that come with turning up your TV volume too loud...read on.


The wireless TV Ears® will operate up to 10 hours on a 3-hour charge. Room to charge two headsets simultaneously.
weighs only 1.6 oz
TV·EARS+

From George Dennis, president and founder of TV Ears, Inc.

"The inspiration for TV Ears® was based on the well-known statistic that nearly 80% of people with hearing loss go undiagnosed and untreated for a variety of reasons which may include vanity or cost of treatment. TV Ears® has proven to be an appealing product to the average person and an excellent introduction to those seeking improved hearing health."

From Dr. John W. House, president of the House Ear Institute

"I have found patients with mild to moderate hearing loss gain the most benefit from TV Ears®. They are the patients who do not wear hearing aids or do not use them at home. They use TV Ears® because other members of the family complain that the TV is too loud. I personally use them to watch TV while I'm riding my exercise bike. I can have the volume of the TV low or off and therefore not bother my family with the loud TV."

Hear every word with today's technology!

- **Television Audio Processing.** (TAP) The transmitter processes the audio from your TV or other audio devices and amplifies regular dialogue, hard to hear voices, and whispers.
- **Automatic Volume Control.** (AVC) Selectively compresses loud bursts of volume that are annoying when watching a program, channel surfing, or during commercials.
- **Infrared technology.** TV Ears' infrared technology provides safe, superior sound quality without interference and frequency drifting. Transmits up to 900 sq. ft.
- **Left-Right balance control.** Allows you to adjust the volume for rich, high-quality sound in both ears.
- **Individual controls.** Multiple headsets can be adjusted to the user's personal needs.
- **Long-lasting charge.** You can quickly charge two headsets at the same time, and TV-Ears® will function up to 10 hours on a 3-hour charge. Charger included.

Bringing the clear voice directly to your ears!

"My wife and I have used them [TV Ears®] almost daily for the past two years and find them an invaluable help in our enjoyment of television—we would not be without them. As a retired otologist, I heartily recommend TV Ears® to people with normal hearing as well as those with hearing loss."

—Robert F., M.D., California

Try them yourself! If you aren't totally amazed...send them back! We're so sure you'll be absolutely astonished with the increase in sound and clarity when using the TV Ears®, that we're backing them with *first*STREET's exclusive in-home 90-day trial. If you aren't completely satisfied, simply return them for the product purchase price.

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